

2013 Golden Jubilee edition

BIHAR YOGA®

CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCIENCE OF YOGA

Karma Yoga Book 6

FOR A BETTER WORLD

*From the teachings of
two great luminaries of the 20th century*

Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati
Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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*Including answers from the satsangs of
Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*



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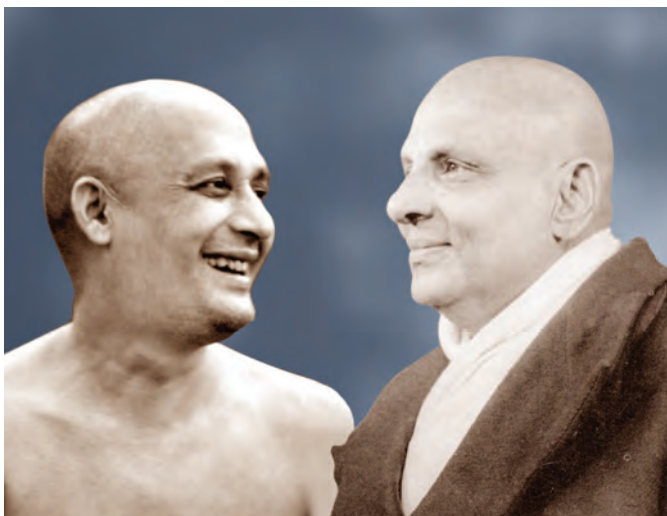
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga
and to our guru Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati
who continues to inspire and guide us
on our spiritual journey.*

Swami Niranjan

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Preface

CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCIENCE OF YOGA

Conversations on the Science of Yoga is an encyclopaedic series which brings together the collected teachings of two generations of masters – Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh and Swami Satyananda Saraswati of Munger. Satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati on his numerous national and international tours also provide the answers to many questions on this vast subject. These luminaries represent a living tradition in which the eternal knowledge and wisdom of yoga has been passed from guru to disciple in a dynamic continuum from the early twentieth century to the first decades of the twenty-first century.

The series consists of sets of books which present the vast, timeless culture of yoga topic by topic, in question and answer format. In this way, complex and profound subjects such as karma yoga, hatha yoga and bhakti yoga, are presented in clear, simple language. These conversations on yoga reflect an ancient and enduring approach to the transmission of wisdom, in which spiritual aspirants seek answers to their questions at the feet of the guru.

Many of the answers also include verses from the various relevant scriptures, connecting the modern experience with the classical tradition. It is through the lives and teachings of the masters that the scriptures are correctly and intuitively

interpreted for each generation, ensuring that the light of these revelations continues to illumine and inspire the hearts and minds of all who aspire for spiritual upliftment.

Conversations on the Science of Yoga has been compiled from the rich archive of satsangs and writings, both published and unpublished, which is held at the Bihar School of Yoga, Munger. The organization of this material into the major branches of yoga and related topics creates a unique interpretation of the classical yogic sciences for the benefit of humanity in the modern era. Deeply founded in tradition, the teachings are both systematic and practical, addressing the needs of individuals and society at a time when adjustment to constant change is placing unprecedented pressure on people all over the world.

The Bihar Yoga tradition

Bihar School of Yoga is ideally placed to produce this major contribution to yogic literature. Founded in 1963 by Swami Satyananda Saraswati, the system known in India as Bihar Yoga and internationally as Satyananda Yoga, seamlessly integrates all facets of the yogic tradition, including the various branches of yoga, the philosophies which are fundamental to the yogic culture and the dynamism of self-

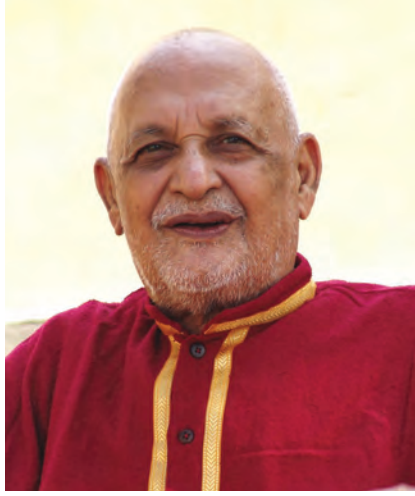


realized preceptors which ensures that the teachings remain fresh and relevant in any age. This all-inclusive approach means that yogic practices are available as tools for holistic life management, while other *vidyas*, spiritual sciences, such as Tantra, Vedanta and Samkhya provide a broad philosophical base. Emerging from this living tradition, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga* is a unique and precious offering to humanity.



Swami Sivananda Saraswati (1887–1963)

Swami Sivananda was a towering spiritual force in the yogic renaissance which developed in India in the first half of the twentieth century. After serving as a doctor in Malaya, he returned to India to pursue his spiritual aspirations, and in 1924 was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa in Rishikesh. He founded the Divine Life Society, toured India extensively, wrote hundreds of books and inspired thousands around the world to practise yoga and lead a divine life. Swami Sivananda's eightfold path of yoga – serve, love, give, purify, do good, be good, meditate, realize – expresses his philosophy of service to humanity and continues to guide the work of the Bihar School of Yoga.



Swami Satyananda Saraswati (1923–2009)

Swami Satyananda was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa by his guru Swami Sivananda, in 1947. After serving his guru's mission in Rishikesh for twelve years, he founded the International Yoga Fellowship in 1956 and the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963. From that base he took the teachings to the rest of the world, fulfilling the mandate of his guru to 'spread yoga from door to door and shore to shore.'

Through his genius and compassion, many ancient, complex and esoteric practices were systematized, simplified and made available to people of all ages, cultures and creeds. Swami Satyananda's blend of charisma and pragmatism attracted multitudes of devotees wherever he went, giving rise to a global movement and creating a far-reaching network of ashrams, yoga centres and teachers. Meanwhile, the headquarters in Bihar continued to expand its many programs, including the publishing division, producing numerous books that both preserve and disseminate the incredibly rich seam of practical wisdom which flows through this lineage.

In 1988 Swami Satyananda renounced his mission in order to live as a paramahansa sannyasin, performing higher

spiritual and vedic sadhanas in an isolated location. During this chapter of his life, he also realized his guru's teaching of 'serve, love, give', by establishing Sivananda Math, an organization dedicated to raising the living standards of the weaker and underprivileged sectors of society.

At midnight on 5 December 2009, Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati attained mahasamadhi.



Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati (1960)

A yogi from earliest childhood, Swami Niranjanananda joined the Bihar School of Yoga in 1964 and was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa in 1971. At the age of eleven he was sent to live abroad by his guru Swami Satyananda, giving him direct experience and understanding of people from a vast array of cultures and walks of life. These years instilled in him a rare, cross-cultural insight into human nature, enabling him to communicate and interact with the international community with familiarity, ease and humour.

Combined with his depth of spiritual and yogic knowledge, this background equipped Swami Niranjanananda to guide the Bihar School of Yoga and the international yoga movement from 1983 until 2008, when he began handing

over the administration to the next generation. During this time he also authored many classic books on yoga, tantra and the upanishads and founded Bihar Yoga Bharati, the world's first yoga university, while continuing extensive national and international touring.

Following retirement from his role at the Bihar School of Yoga, Swami Niranjanananda established Sannyasa Peeth for the development and training of sannyasins, and for his own pursuit of the higher sadhanas of sannyasa.

As the spiritual successor to Swami Satyananda, Swami Niranjanananda continues to inspire aspirants around the world.



Yoga is not a philosophy, it is a practical science. Philosophy gives you knowledge, yoga gives you experience. This is the beauty of yoga. That experience is a manifestation of your inner being.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Introduction

The aim of karma yoga is to become the perfect reflector of the cosmic consciousness in the arena of the manifested world.

—*Swami Satyananda*

The meaning, purpose and culmination of *yoga* is union, or oneness. This union is often thought of in relation to the attainment of *samadhi*, the profound, mystic state in which the individual experiences a merging with the cosmic nature. There is, however, another concept of oneness in which the interaction of the individual with the world becomes the field for attaining union, as the many practical opportunities in day-to-day living are used for moving beyond the limitations of duality. Swami Sivananda describes this inclusive approach, which is available to everyone without delay, when he says, “Yoga is a way of life, not something that is divorced from life. Yoga is not forsaking action, but efficient performance in the right spirit. Yoga is not running away from home and human habitation, but a process of moulding an attitude to home and society with a new understanding. Yoga is not a turning away from life; it makes life spiritual.”

This refreshing view of yoga opens our minds to the possibilities that exist here and now. It is a beautiful vision of life, giving immense value to the entire journey, whilst

simultaneously benefiting others. The life lived by each individual affects that of many; hence, each person who strives for positivity and spiritual consciousness uplifts those around them through their actions and interactions. To walk this path a map or system is needed, as a special and particular way of thinking, doing and interacting must be cultivated. Karma yoga provides the map, showing how to use action as a means to integrate yoga into every moment while remaining involved in daily affairs. *Karma Yoga Book 6: For a Better World* explains how the sadhana of karma yoga is refined through the development of non-attachment, the ability to act with efficiency and equanimity, the transition to seva, and through seva to the offering of all action as worship.

Freedom from attachment

The concept of vairagya is vital to karma yoga, as it contains both the aspect of witnessing and the absence of identification with one's thoughts and actions. Detachment is a common translation of the Sanskrit word vairagya, used to describe a state of mind which yoga says is essential for spiritual growth. Unfortunately, the translation is inadequate, as being 'detached' can imply a lack of feeling and caring towards life. The term 'non-attachment' is a little closer, but Swami Niranjanananda explains that it is not quite right either, saying, "The word 'non-attachment' does not really exist in English. In Sanskrit it exists in the form of *vairagya*, to 'be free from attachment, without rejecting anything'. It represents a state of mind that is continuously observing the nature of events and is unaffected." The phrase 'without rejecting anything' is an important part of the definition in relation to karma yoga, as the karma yogi participates fully in whatever life brings, contributing to society with positivity and dynamism, thereby not only transforming himself, but helping to make a better world.

This theme is developed in the *Bhagavad Gita* (18:10) when Sri Krishna redefines renunciation in his discussion with

Arjuna, declaring that, “The man of renunciation, pervaded by purity, intelligent and with doubts cut asunder, does not hate a disagreeable work nor is he attached to an agreeable one.” This description of renunciation makes no mention of giving anything up, rather it is based on positive internal qualities and an attitude beyond duality. There is no mention of meditation, austerity or seclusion, to the contrary, it is involvement in work that is specified. The importance of the *Bhagavat Gita* as a text on karma yoga is highlighted by the many references to it and quotes from it in *For a Better World*. The karma yogi, therefore, is involved in worldly affairs, but in a certain way. The events of life become the field of the karma yogi’s sadhana. Sadhana purifies the individual, and when it is performed on the stage of the world, the process of purification spreads into the worldly domain.

There can be no karma yoga without vairagya, as remaining unaffected by the karmas is the key to liberation from them. Karma yoga says that freedom from karma is reached through perfection of karma. The perfection of karma means that it is no longer binding, it is devoid of negativity, and it is an expression of connection with one’s deep, spiritual nature. In that state of perfection, life becomes a realization of divinity. How is karma to be perfected? What is perfection in action? Adopting the attitude of vairagya has been given as the first step in karma yoga. With vairagya in place, perfection of action becomes possible by cultivating two qualities: efficiency and equanimity.

Virtuous circles

Due to the all-encompassing nature of karma yoga, it is easy to forget that just as other branches of yoga are based on specific practices and lifestyles, so too is karma yoga. While hatha yoga prescribes shatkarmas, asanas and pranayamas, and raja yoga prescribes eight limbs starting with yama and niyama, karma yoga clearly prescribes the attributes which must be cultivated and nurtured as sadhana. Vairagya has

already been mentioned as a fundamental quality which must go on in the background, a little like the operating system of a computer which influences all the other functions, while remaining hidden. Into this operating system go various programs which determine the way karma yoga is implemented: key amongst these are efficiency and equanimity.

Those who are new to the idea of karma yoga often assume that being unattached to the results of action means one won't be motivated and the task at hand will suffer. To the contrary, efficiency is one of the attributes Sri Krishna insists upon, and it is addressed in detail in *For a Better World*. The practice of efficiency in karma yoga creates a virtuous circle: when conscious effort for skill in action is made, one's awareness becomes keenly focused, the mind has to be one-pointed, a meditative quality arises, and the benefits extend far beyond a job well done, as deep mental purification and transformation occur. The benefits of such an accomplishment flow on beyond their source, as any action, task or relationship is part of a network of actions, tasks and relationships.

Equanimity is a sattwic state in which the mind remains calm and level in spite of success or failure, pleasure or pain. Such stability of mind is the opposite of most people's nature and conditioning, which tends towards highs and lows, excitement and depression, hope and disappointment. Equanimity is an outcome of vairagya, and a contributing factor to efficiency. The storms of emotion, whether they take us up or down, consume energy and cloud judgement, both of which reduce efficiency. It takes time to train the mind in steadiness, but when karma yoga is sincerely practised, equanimity gradually and spontaneously unfolds. Swami Satyananda speaks of this process when he says, "Mental balance is a sadhana, it is a means of taking care of the mind. The mind must become as clear as a crystal, as calm as a still pond. Through karma yoga, the personality becomes gradually more and more pure, until unbroken peace of

mind is experienced.” Peace of mind in an individual has a profound effect on all who come in contact with that person, as no man is an island.

Moving into seva

Seva takes karma yoga into a deeper dimension, as all actions are stripped of selfishness and are performed purely for others. When karma yoga shifts into seva, the self-centred motive has to vanish. Swami Niranjan says, “Seva becomes a way of life. One lives for others and not for oneself. This is the difference between karma yoga and seva. In order to deepen the experience of karma yoga, one has to add the component of seva yoga. First karma yoga is practised and then one moves into seva.” The tasks can remain the same. It is not necessary to become engrossed in charitable work: whatever is done, the attitude becomes one of seva. One becomes a channel for a higher power to flow through, as there is no feeling of mine or thine, all is an offering. As such, the process naturally evolves into an act of worship.

Swami Sivananda considered seva as the priority of spiritual life, without which one cannot progress. He said, “The meaning of true life is service and sacrifice. The more energy one spends in serving and elevating others, the more divine energy flows. One who lives a life of seva understands that the secret of God-realization is serving humanity.” By the cultivation of *atmabhava*, feeling oneself in others, separateness dissolves and creation is experienced as one. Life is felt as a divine gift, one’s talents are experienced as a means for helping others, personal desires and ambitions evaporate and as part of this deep transformation, the ego is sublimated in the process of perfected karma yoga, expressed by Christ in the Bible when he said, “Let Thy will be done.”

Culmination

For a Better World is the culmination of a six volume journey into karma yoga. This remarkable and historic compilation

presents the complete teachings of three generations of masters on the topic of karma yoga. Never before has the topic of karma yoga been explored and revealed in such detail, offering unparalleled depth of wisdom and knowledge on both the theory and practical application of a branch of yoga which has previously been little known. This wealth of experience and understanding is available nowhere else. In accordance with the classical tradition of yoga, the preceptors of Bihar School of Yoga are enlightened masters who maintain the authenticity of the sacred *vidyas*, or sciences, whilst interpreting them and keeping them alive in their own times. To make the world a better place by uplifting human consciousness is the sole and selfless mission of such great beings. For this purpose, by their grace, these teachings on karma yoga have been given.



1

Detachment

WHAT IS DETACHMENT?

Why is detachment necessary?

Swami Sivananda: The secret of karma yoga is to combine deep interest with perfect detachment, to be ever active and at the same time to feel inwardly as the non-doer and non-enjoyer. One feels that the true self or the godhead within is the eternal witness.

To work with detachment is doubtless a difficult task. It is uphill work, but it becomes easy and pleasant for a person of patience and determination. Everyone will have to do it if they want to attain bliss and immortality. Everybody tries to do it at some point, maybe after taking five hundred births. The question is: why not cut the cycle short and enjoy supreme bliss right now, in this birth? That is wisdom.

Are there particular techniques for developing detachment in action?

Swami Satyananda: In order to succeed in detachment a certain type of philosophy must be developed, which is the basis for action. One way is to perform karma with the feeling that God is the doer and one is just a participant and not involved. Another way is to think that events are happening due to their destiny or the will of God. The third way is to practise self-analysis, and that is called yoga.

In yoga, one relates desire to the mind with detachment. Detachment is a quality of the mind, in the same way that passion and ambition are qualities of the mind. The mind radiates and transmits these different patterns. The mental radiations have to be balanced according to the quality of the mind, whether one has a weak or strong mind. This can be done through constant discrimination.

How is it possible to live with detachment?

Swami Satyananda: Detachment and non-identification are difficult and sometimes a sort of hypocrisy. The aspirant keeps saying, “I renounce the fruit; I am not the doer,” and yet he is still unhappy. Therefore, detachment and non-identification belong to individuals of high quality. Others are affected by any type of result which they accrue from life.

A person who remains unaffected by the inconsistencies, contradictions and problems of life is said to be detached from the world, just as the lotus leaf remains unaffected by the water in which it is immersed. This state of release or detachment from life is a state of perfection. It is not easy to attain. It is only after the successful pursuit of knowledge and working hard throughout life that one can remain engaged in work without any desire and thought of result. The state of detachment from life is the ultimate result of the life of a sadhaka performing sadhanas. Living with detachment is difficult. The person who masters it is the master of himself; he is a swami. For most people it is difficult to live and work without any attachment.

In India, people have been thinking about how to live a detached life for thousands of years. They thought about renouncing everything and going to the mountains, but realized that it would not serve the purpose. The instinct of attachment is so peculiar that it not only binds to a large property but also to a small needle – the suffering is the same.

There is no use fighting with the items of attachment or practising detachment here and now. There are certain procedures and preparations for the mind which lead to

detachment. Detachment does not mean disassociation from objects, people and property. Where the ego is related to an action or an event, attachment is automatically created. When the ego is not related to the action, event or person, it doesn't matter. In order to perfect detachment the relationships with people, events and objects have to be revised. Detachment is a philosophy, an outlook and a way of dealing with the matters of life.

If a person renounces his duties, obligations, family, friends, relatives and loved ones, if he renounces his country and present situation in life, remaining half-clad in the mountains and living on little food, he may still be attached to his ego. The external attachment to the object is an expression of the attachment to the ego. The cause of suffering is a person's involvement with his ego. If he can detach himself from the ego, it does not matter where he lives, with whom he lives or whom he loves. Non-attachment is actually non-involvement of the ego.

Whenever interactions with work and life have a definite purpose, one can operate in the world without any involvement. One can involve the body, thoughts and senses, but there has to be an objective; otherwise detachment cannot be practised. Objects or relationships with people may be renounced, but it will not make any change. Instead one has to fix an objective for life. The objective given by the wise people is purification of the self, the mind or heart. Once this objective is fixed, one can easily detach the ego from the karma and work.

How can attachment, non-attachment and detachment be understood?

Swami Niranjanananda: Attachment is an attraction or a like which is expressed in many ways to people, situations, possessions and definitely in one's projections and expressions. In fact, people do not know how to live without attachment. It is the human tendency to identify with, link up and relate to something intimately from a personal point

of view. People cannot develop objectivity in that situation as they are constantly projecting themselves.

Detachment is a strong word. When detachment is understood as repulsion for something to which there is attachment or attraction, then the negative qualities of the human mind come to the surface and make a person insensitive and self-centred. Reactions that happen due to the influence of such negative individual traits can often lead to discord and disharmony.

Yoga says 'no' to this understanding of detachment. Situations in life or in oneself should not be avoided; rather one must learn to accept the existence of what is around. Once the situations have been accepted and their nature is known, it is possible to become non-attached. The word 'non-attachment' does not really exist in English. In Sanskrit it exists in the form of *vairagya*, 'to be free from attachment, without rejecting anything'. It represents a state of mind that is continuously observing the nature of events and is unaffected. Non-attachment can easily be developed provided one can expand the awareness to see the reality behind things.

The word *vairagya* is composed of two words: *raga*, attraction, and *vi*, not to be affected. *Vi* is a prefix which in combination with *raga* means 'not being affected by attraction'. It goes without saying that once there is attraction to something, the possessive qualities of the nature and ego manifest. Sometimes that attraction can be positive, sometimes negative. One has to look at things from their positive as well as their negative aspect. When attraction is negative it is limiting; when attraction is positive it is freeing and gives a different vision.

Positive attraction is known as non-attachment: acceptance of situations without reacting negatively. It is like the prayer of St Francis of Assisi: "Lord make me an instrument of Thy peace. Where there is discord let me sow love." This is not a philosophical statement but a practical one.

People tend to run away from discord. They do not have the strength to plant the seeds of love where there

is absolute discord. At that time, the state of mind is not detachment or attachment, or a reaction; it is acceptance of the condition as being real. Discord and anger are real, so what is the use of reacting against them? The moment a person reacts, he is creating a process within himself which recognizes the negativity, and the moment that happens, the mind, nature and behaviour are affected by that impression. Past impressions and memories bring up the corresponding negative emotion and anger, frustration or discord are projected.

Non-attachment is a state of mind which is full of *viveka*, discrimination. In fact, it can be called viveka. To have the ability to discriminate and to act accordingly is the yogic concept of non-attachment.

Why is there worry related to work?

Swami Sivananda: Many people are attached to the work they do. They like some kinds of work, take an interest in it and are unwilling to leave the work if conditions require it. They take undue responsibility on their shoulders, pine and labour under cares, worries and anxieties. This is not yoga, as there is attachment to the work owing to the quality of rajas.

Work cannot bring misery. It is the attachment and identification with work that brings in worries, troubles and unhappiness. In karma yoga one must be ready to discontinue any work at any time, without a care for success or failure. There is great joy in such karma yoga which is without any personal element.

How should negative experiences be overcome?

Swami Satyananda: Every stage of life is part of evolution. A baby cannot walk, but a toddler can and a boy can run. These are the stages of development. In the beginning a person falters, makes mistakes, cannot think properly, becomes angry, worries and feels anxiety. He has passions, jealousies and hatreds, which are in perfect harmony with the scheme of evolution. These experiences have to be gone

through, just as a baby becomes a boy and a boy becomes a young man. Everything evolves; the spiritual aspirant does not stay at one point. When hatred arises, one should experience it and come out of it. When jealousy comes, one has to experience it. It should not be subdued or suppressed, but experienced and left behind.

Just as the traveller leaves the milestones behind, so every aspirant has to leave the milestones of life behind, the positive and negative mental tendencies. The problem with most people is that they are stuck in one mood and do not know how to come out of it. The emotional desires and demands, the psychological obligations and necessities become obstructions. One keeps moving around them for twenty, thirty or forty years until the day one departs for the grave. People remain stuck because they don't leave things behind. A spiritual aspirant must undergo every experience in life, whether positive or negative, divine or instinctive, high or low, easy or difficult, but he should leave it, just as a traveller leaves the milestones behind him.

That is the central theory of detachment. Do not stick to anything, but simply leave everything behind. Today one may be quarrelling for some reason, but not tomorrow, as today and tomorrow are twenty-four hours apart. In twenty-four hours one can move on further and come to a point where the problem or the fight of yesterday is an event of the past. The same idea applies to everything in life: prosperity, power, affluence and youth. At first one is young and slowly one becomes old. Detachment can be perfected when one flows with the rhythm of life and does not stick to anything indefinitely.

In order to transcend this life, a person must go through it. There is a special way of action and involvement in life without attachment. The *Bhagavad Gita* uses the word *anasakti*, which means 'being involved physically, mentally and monetarily but not emotionally'. The ego and personality are not involved but are like the actors in a play. A husband in a play does not give his soul to the actress

who plays his wife, and an enemy does not really hate his opponent. The actor acts love or hatred according to the role he is playing. So far as his personal life is concerned, he is unaffected, untouched and totally detached.

Swami Vivekananda said, “Act but do not allow the action or the thought to produce a deep impression on the mind. Let the ripples come and go. Let huge actions proceed from the muscles and the brain, but let them not make any deep impressions on the soul.” This is the technique of karma yoga, which one should evolve in life. Living life, having relationships and dealing with everybody without attachment is the practice of karma yoga. If one can evolve this technique of detachment, one can fulfil the purpose of nature.

What must be renounced according to the Bhagavad Gita?

Swami Sivananda: The last discourse of the *Bhagavad Gita* opens with a question by Arjuna, asking what is true sannyasa and true *tyaga*, renunciation (18:1):

*Sannyasasya mahaabaaho tattvamichchhaami veditum;
Tyaagasya cha hrishikesha prithakkeshinishoodana.*

I desire to know severally, O mighty-armed, the essence or truth of renunciation, O Hrishikesha, as also of abandonment, O slayer of Keshi!

In reply to this important and crucial query, the blessed Lord makes it clear that real sannyasa or renunciation lies in the renunciation of selfish actions, and even more in the renunciation of the desire or greed for the fruits of action (18:2):

*Kaamyanaam karmanaam nyaasam sannyasam kavayo viduh;
Sarvakarmaphalatyaagam praahustyaagam vichakshanaah.*

The sages understand sannyasa to be the renunciation of action with desire; the wise declare the abandonment of the fruits of all actions as *tyaga*.

It is said clearly that selfless and virtuous actions conducive to the welfare of others should not be abandoned. One must engage oneself in performing such actions, but renouncing attachment and greed (18:5–6):

*Yajnadaanatapahkarma na tyaaajyam kaaryameva tat;
Yajno daanam tapashchaiva paavanaani maneeshinaam.*

*Etaanyapi tu karmaani sangam tyaktvaa phalaani cha;
Kartavyaaneeti me paartha nishchitam matamuttamam.*

Acts of sacrifice, gift and austerity should not be abandoned, but performed; sacrifice, gift and also austerity are the purifiers of the wise. (5)

But even these actions should be performed leaving aside attachment and the desire for rewards, O Arjuna! This is My certain and best conviction. (6)

While performing his legitimate duties the true and proper renunciate abandons selfishness and attachment. This is called *sattwic tyaga*. He neither hates unpleasant action nor is he attached to pleasurable action. Sri Krishna continues (18:9–12):

*Kaaryamityeva yatkarma niyatam kriyate' rjuna;
Sangam tyaktvaa phalam chaiva sa tyagah saattviko matah.*

*Na dveshtyakushalam karma kushale naanushajjate;
Tyaagee sattvasamaavishto medhaavee chhinnasamshayah.*

*Na hi dehabhritaa shakyam tyaktum karmaanyasheshatah;
Yastu karmaphalatyaagee sa tyageetyabhidheeyate.*

*Anishtamishitam mishram cha trividham karmanah phalam;
Bhavatyatyaaginaam pretya na tu sannyaasinaam kvachit.*

Whatever obligatory action is done, O Arjuna, merely because it ought to be done, abandoning attachment and also the desire for reward, that renunciation is regarded as *sattwic*. (9)

The man of renunciation, pervaded by purity, intelligent and with his doubts cut asunder, does not hate a disagreeable work, nor is he attached to an agreeable one. (10)

Verily, it is not possible for an embodied being to abandon actions entirely; but he who relinquishes the rewards of actions is verily called a man of renunciation. (11)

The threefold fruit of action: evil, good and mixed, accrues after death to the non-abandoners, but never to the abandoners. (12)

As it is not possible to renounce action, the renunciation of egoism, selfishness and attachment in activity is declared as true renunciation. Karma does not accumulate and bind a person who is established in such inner renunciation.

How are desire and attachment linked?

Swami Niranjanananda: Desire and attachment are the two aspects of life which control, regulate and guide the expressions. Desire is for the fulfilment and attainment of what is wished, and attachment is identification with the object of desire. When one identifies with the object of desire, it is known as attachment. When one is able to simply witness the desire, desire becomes a motivating factor to act in life. The generation of desire in the mind and the association or identification of the mind with sense objects have been identified as the cause of strife, anxiety and imbalance in human emotions and intelligence.

How can detachment be explained in simple terms?

Swami Satyananda: There are two types of attitudes: one is based on attachment and the other on non-attachment. The difference between the two should be understood. Supposing a parent has a babysitter who comes to the home every day to take care of his child. One day the child is sick and he pays the babysitter extra to stay the night and

administer medicines to the child. The babysitter keeps watch throughout the night and does not sleep, as it is part of her duty. The parent, anxious about his child, also does not sleep that night. Neither one sleeps, but there is a difference. The babysitter does not sleep because she has an obligation to watch over the child, and the parent does not sleep because he is bound by his attachment.

The parent is not involved in the child's care, but is extremely worried. He cannot sleep because the thought of the child is with him all the time. The babysitter is serving the child day and night, but is not anxious. Although she wishes the child to be well, she is not afraid or emotionally disturbed by the situation. She is acting in the drama, but at the same time she can witness it; that is called detachment. The parent, however, is only reacting to the child's condition with attachment, due to his pre-established relationship.

One day the babysitter says to the father, "I must go home, my child is sick." He pleads with her to stay, but she cannot be persuaded and leaves on the next train. She cannot sleep at all the whole night while travelling as now her child is involved. She has the same problem as the parent she was working for. A person's attitude to an action depends on his relationships.

Detachment is not just the physical separation of two individuals or objects. Detachment has to be practised on a different plane altogether. It can be developed by reassessing and re-evaluating the relationships. A person has to re-establish his relationships with his actions, the people and situations in his life. If his interactions are free of personal motives, he is not bound by attachments.

How do the scriptures explain living with detachment?

Swami Satyananda: The sages and thinkers down through the ages have been teaching people to live in this world like the lotus flower, untouched by the surrounding water. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (5:10):

*Brahmanyaadhaaya karmaani sangam tyaktvaa karoti yah;
Lipyate na sa paapena padmapatramivaambhasaa.*

He who performs actions, offering them to Brahman and abandoning attachment, is not tainted by sin as a lotus leaf is untainted by water.

The lotus grows up through the water, which is its basis. Without water, there would be no lotus. It would be logical to say that since the lotus lives in water it must get wet, but it does not. Whenever one touches the petals or leaves of the lotus, they are found to be absolutely dry.

The sages cite another example. The tongue lives among a set of thirty-two teeth. It is a perilous condition. At any moment the tongue can be bitten to pieces, but despite this it manages to remain unharmed. People should learn to live unaffected in the midst of struggle. They should be as dextrous as the tongue and learn to live in the midst of continuous problems and difficulties, facing the ups and downs, hopes and despairs of life, without being tainted.

It is no sin to remain in this world. Sin lies in keeping the world stored up in the mind. Just as a person crosses the river sitting in a boat, but has absolutely no attachment to the boat, so one must live in this world and continue to do one's duties, but without becoming attached. This is a hired ferry; sometimes it is on this side and sometimes on that. As long as one does not see God, life is incomplete.

Can selfless service be practised at home?

Swami Satyananda: The principle of selfless service can be applied at home. Parents do not work for themselves, they work for their children. However, they are attached to the fruit of their work as they are attached to their children. If they could put their attachment aside, they would not be affected in the process. A mother may serve her child selflessly, but there is attachment in it. She goes through pain and pleasure in the process. If she could apply the principle

of *anasakti*, non-attachment, there would be no greater sannyasin than the mother.

What is aparigraha?

Swami Niranjanananda: Non-possessiveness, *aparigraha*, is non-attachment. When there is attachment and self-motivation, there is a feeling of possessiveness. A person tends to become possessive about things to which he is attached, the objects, environment and people he likes. That possessiveness manifests later as a drive for ego satisfaction. It is good to have possessiveness, but it should not be influenced by the ego or selfish nature. Possessiveness should become a process of caring or nurturing and maintenance, without the attitude of selfishness attached to it.

To develop the quality of non-possessiveness means to become non-attached. Attachment means craving and detachment means cutting off. Non-attachment means not being affected by whatever happens. Aparigraha allows one to perceive the attachments which bind one to rajasic or tamasic states of mind or to the world of senses and objects, and which do not allow the perception to rise beyond the selfish qualities. Aparigraha, the reverse of attachment, is an effort to rise above the things that hold one down.

Does non-attachment mean that people will become socially irresponsible?

Swami Satyananda: This is a common question and criticism. No, it will not happen. In fact, exactly the opposite will occur. People who become detached become more responsible to society and humankind. One works better by being detached and in this way everyone benefits.

In the ashram there are two good cars. Many people say, “How can the sannyasins in the ashram be real swamis, they are still attached to and absorbed in the material benefits of the world?” This is a total misunderstanding of the idea of renunciation. These people fail to realize that there is little or no attachment to the cars, which are in the ashram

merely for utility. Even though they are polished regularly and maintained in good order, they are regarded as objects to be used. There is no sentimentality and no attachment. It is the mental attitude that is important. The essence of renunciation is being able to renounce attachment to the objects yet still be involved with them.

Renunciation has to be cultivated gradually. At first it will be limited renunciation, and probably more intellectual than anything else. There will be little depth of feeling. As one continues to practise karma yoga one finds that renunciation arises spontaneously and with more and more intensity. One becomes automatically more detached as one progresses along the path of karma yoga.

What is the result of detachment?

Swami Satyananda: Attachment brings pain and misery, while detachment brings calmness and contentment. Existing attitudes should be changed and detachment developed in every aspect of life. It is only a method which leads to relaxation and eventually higher awareness. Detachment transforms itself into love for everything, not ego love for one's own advantage, but compassion. This happens as surely as night follows day, as the deeper relationship existing between people and events is understood.

CULTIVATING NON-ATTACHMENT

What is the real meaning of renunciation?

Swami Satyananda: It is easy to misunderstand yogic ideas and become bewildered by apparent contradictions. A good example is the idea of renunciation. One is often told to renounce the world and take up a life of contemplation. On the other hand, it is said that one should not discard objects and duties, but live fully in the world while practising karma yoga. There seems to be an obvious and irreconcilable contradiction between these two viewpoints, but actually there is no contradiction as both ideas say the same. The

confusion only arises due to wrong interpretation. Some people leave their material possessions and duties, thinking that is renunciation. However, it is the attachment to objects, not the actual objects, situations, actions or possessions, that one should try to renounce. This is a big difference.

Whichever path or paths of yoga one adopts, the initial aim is to relax the mind-body complex, to make it healthy, reduce the sense of ego and bring about various other positive changes. Some people retire to a quiet place and start to practise hatha yoga and raja yoga. However, this method is only for those who do not have too many inner conflicts or strong ties with the world. Few people can do it, as most have responsibilities and no great urge to leave the busy world.

It is not necessary to become a hermit, but one should continue the daily activities and simultaneously practise karma yoga. Either living in solitude or in bustling surroundings, one should develop a sense of renunciation, which is necessary to gain the most from yogic practices. If an aspirant retires to a cave, with outward renunciation of the world but a deep inward longing for worldly objects and enjoyments, he is fooling himself and will make no progress in his sadhana.

The path for most people is in and through the world while practising yoga, including karma yoga. Therefore, one should be involved with the world, it is part of life. Life exists to be experienced. At the same time one must try to become more aware and detached so that the ups and downs of daily life have less of an influence. The aim is to develop a mental attitude so that grave crises do not shake one deeply. They may have a superficial effect but not be overwhelming. It does not mean that one should become like a vegetable, hardened and totally indifferent. Rather, life is to be accepted as it is, with its conflicts, hardships and apparent unfairness. This is renunciation.

Anyone can start to develop the attitude of renunciation. A king or beggar can renounce and still live in the world of activity and duties. A king can be surrounded

by fabulous wealth and be totally detached. There were a number of kings in ancient India, like Ashoka and Janaka, who epitomized renunciation. Even though a beggar has no material belongings, he can be completely attached if he continually craves objects and pleasures he does not have. Real renunciation is a mental attitude and not at all concerned with what one possesses or does not possess.

How did the Bhagavad Gita present karma yoga to the world?

Swami Satyananda: Before the *Bhagavad Gita*, yoga was presented to the world as a life of withdrawal from karma and responsibility. Yoga was not understood as a way of developing the personality and helping with daily problems. The *Bhagavad Gita* has pointed out the way of karma yoga, which no other teaching in the world has shown. In relation to karma, people had only seen two paths: renunciation and enjoyment. The renunciates abandon actions because they lead to troubles, worries, difficulties and tension. The materialistic people say, “Why are you abandoning actions? Relax and enjoy the world, have a rollicking time.”

The *Bhagavad Gita* created a new connection and named it ‘karma yoga’, maintaining an attitude of non-attachment while living in the world without being affected by the results of actions. Sri Krishna said that one can live life fully, interacting with people and events in life and experiencing everything, but without attachment. Non-attachment is the attitude or feeling with which a yogi lives in the world without being affected by it. Most people live in the world to fulfil their desires. When the desires are not fulfilled, they feel unhappy, frustrated and disappointed. Ultimately, the entire personality is affected.

How can one become free of attachment?

Swami Satyananda: No one can be free of attachment. It is like asking how to stop the winter, how to stop the sun or how to stop the wind.

One should have attachment, but not selfish attachment. In Rikhiapeeth, I am attached to the people of the local area. I always talk about that man's daughter who is going to get married, that man's wife who is sick, or that tuberculosis patient who did not come for medicine last time. I am attached to them and they are attached to me. However, this attachment does not bind me; it is not bondage, not an outcome of ignorance, it does not corrupt my soul, it will not make me unhappy and wretched.

When a person loves others who do not come in the category of 'mine', when he has attachment to people who are not his, who are outside the category of 'we two and our two', that attachment is a positive and constructive quality. A person without attachment is worthless, just like a vegetable. The attachment to one's husband, wife, children, property and business should be corrected as it produces karma. It influences the mind and causes worry, anxiety and tension. It increases blood pressure, makes one weak and sick and does not lead to happiness.

Instead of attachment, there should be a relationship with those who are 'mine'. There must be a relationship with one's wife, husband and children, but attachment should be for others. People must have relationships with their families and attachment for those who do not belong to them. When there is attachment to the family, it is called *swartha*, selfishness. When others are involved it is called *paramartha*, for others.

However, human beings are born with attachment. They are a product of the attachment of a husband's and wife's love for each other. The samskara of attachment between a husband and wife at the time of union is passed on to the child; it is born with this samskara, and no one can help it.

In order to find balance there must be some attachment for others. Non-attachment comes by diverting the attachment. What a person feels for his mother, father, wife and children is personal attachment, but attachment for someone who is not part of the family is unselfish attachment, and no longer attachment.

Without attachment there can be no affection or service and no great work can be done. The great acts of patriotism were performed due to attachment. One should not try to fight against passion, anger, greed and attachment unnecessarily by adopting a wrong attitude, but simply change the direction.

How can detachment be developed by someone who has a weak or immature mind?

Swami Satyananda: It is no use telling a person who is emotionally immature to practise detachment. He will have to be immersed in attachment and go headlong and neck deep into attachment, like a madman. At some point he will have a shock, and a glimpse of detachment will come. This glimpse is born out of a relationship and experience, and balance starts with this. At first this detachment is small. The passions may be totally violent, but at one point there is awareness of detachment. As the person goes along freely with attachments, detachment grows. This is the natural culmination of life and it happens to everybody.

How can one become free of attachment without causing repression?

Swami Satyananda: In such situations it is better to wait. A person should just decide that he would like to break the attachment and let it run its own course. Many events in life change quite naturally.

Does non-attachment mean indifference and avoiding of improvement in life?

Swami Satyananda: In Sanskrit, the word for detachment is anasakti, unaffectedness, which is the correct attitude to cultivate. If life has given a person a shock and he is affected by it, he will not improve. Indifference is something else. Supposing a son does not care for his father. Should the father be indifferent? No, he must try to improve the son's

attitude. Yet if the father is unsuccessful, his mind will remain calm and quiet.

Similarly, one must try to witness what is happening in life, but at the same time correct the wrongs that are taking place. The inner soul, the inner life, which is meant for spiritual evolution, should be free from the effects. That is the kind of attitude which has to be developed.

What are some of the common errors made when practising non-attachment?

Swami Satyananda: If a person makes the practice of non-attachment an external show, people will become hostile towards him and call him a crazy man. Real detachment is a philosophy, not an external show. It does not have to be expressed in day-to-day action. While working in the family, shop or office, a person should act normally and not say, “I am so detached.”

The great mistake of many ashram inmates is that they become sidetracked by power, position and status. They identify so much with being the secretary, director, in-charge, cashier or accountant that they don't even know why they have come to an ashram. Surely they did not come to accumulate more karma! The ashram is supposed to be a place where one is unburdened, and therefore it is necessary to have the correct attitude towards karma. A person should not take himself or his work too seriously. The world continues without him. Without becoming fanatical, he should work as well as he can under the given circumstances, with as much detachment and awareness as possible. Renunciation does not mean renunciation of actions but of attachment.

Why are people attached to the work they are doing?

Swami Sivananda: Many people are attached to the work they do. They like some kind of work and take an interest in it, and they dislike another kind of work. They are unwilling to leave the work even if the conditions require it. They take undue responsibility on their shoulders and labour with

worry and anxiety. There is attachment to the work due to the quality of rajas. This is not yoga at all. Worldly people always work with attachment and hence they suffer.

There must not be the least attachment to any kind of work for a karma yogi. He must be ready to leave any work at any time. There may be a divine call upon him for a certain work. He will have to take it up at once without any grumbling, whatever the nature of the work may be. If there is a divine call, he may start a worldwide movement. He has to stop the undertaking if the conditions and circumstances demand it. He should not care whether there is success or failure, but simply obey the divine call and act like a soldier on the battlefield. When there is no attachment to the work, it is yoga. There is great joy in such karma yoga because there is no personal element present.

What is the foundation of karma sannyasa?

Swami Satyananda: During grihastha ashrama, the householder is involved in karma, which creates more karma. He creates *samskaras*, mental impressions, to which he is bound due to anasakti or involvement. It is possible to associate with family, children, responsibilities and obligations either with total attachment or with detachment. However, he has only been taught to base his associations on attachment. Nobody has ever been shown how to live with relatives, discharge duties, solve problems and interact with family members, friends, wealth, money and property with detachment. The art of living a detached life is called *karma sannyasa*.

Detachment is not something that can be developed just by thinking. Unless one has some experience which changes the quality of the mind, the meaning of detachment cannot be understood. To understand anasakti, vairagya, sannyasa or detachment is more than just an intellectual process. One must have a different quality of mind, and for that purpose the mind has to be trained and educated.

How can detachment be developed?

Swami Niranjanananda: Sri Krishna tells Arjuna to keep his actions and attachments separate. He says, “Keep your actions and the desire for action separate. Keep your actions and the results of your actions separate; do not let anything affect your creative and natural skill and ability. If at any point there is expectation from the action and you are looking for gain and loss from the action, the mind will become entangled in the action and you will reap the consequences of either grief or elation. In this manner the mind continues to swing between grief and happiness. This swing of the mind keeps it disturbed, distracted and looking outwards. The more you look out, the more entangled the senses become with the sense objects. When you become entangled with sense objects, more desires arise, more attachments crop up and again the mind is buffeted by the winds of loss and gain. The cycle of grief starts once again. Therefore, involve yourself physically, mentally, wholeheartedly in the present moment, in the karma that you are performing now.”

The karma that one performs is according to the space, environment, time, location and need of the present moment. If a person is aware of the present karma and tries to do his best, that karma will free him from the negative, binding, confining expression, behaviour and mood of the senses and mind.

What is the role of karma?

Swami Satyananda: By living in the ashram and undergoing different experiences over many years, one finds that karma is not only for accomplishment and achievement, but also leads to selflessness. Life is meant for finding greater dimensions, probing wider horizons, and karma is the key to such efforts. It has become essential for each person who adopts the spiritual path to realize that what is needed is sublimation and redirection of karma, not disowning and fleeing from karma. Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that everybody should do work, whether through the body, mind or intellect.

If one is free from attachment, this karma becomes the tool for purification.

How should the fear of giving up attachments be tackled?

Swami Satyananda: A person should break the cord which binds him, and which he fears to lose. When a person says, “Oh, I have to renounce my desires, my passions and love; it is not possible,” it is his fear which speaks as he does not understand non-attachment. Renunciation is not required, only a process of understanding and non-identification.

Yoga calls that particular spirit *vairagya*, which is different from *dispassion*, *detachment* or *renunciation*. It is the spirit with which the maidservant is working for the family. People can talk to one another without attachment, love each other without attachment and serve each other without attachment. They can live with each other for eighty years without attachment, but nobody knows that it can be done.

Society builds a structure which only survives due to attachment; however, everybody has the capacity to not identify. When a girl loves a boy, he is hers. When a boy loves a girl, she is his. After some time, if one of them is not behaving according to the other’s wishes, they are not theirs. How quickly non-identification has taken place! The quality of *vairagya* is present in everyone, but most people are not able to express it due to fear.

The quality of happiness and satisfaction is greater with *vairagya* than with attachment. The quality of happiness is greater if nothing can disturb the mind. With attachment, success makes one happy and failure makes one unhappy, so the happiness is short-lived. If one can continue to feel the same happiness in spite of failure, the happiness will be greater and enduring.

How does an aspirant know when he is truly practising karma yoga?

Swami Satyananda: It is difficult to practise karma yoga. One may do relief work in a charitable hospital or an orphanage,

but karma yoga is not charitable or honorary work. Karma yoga can be done by everyone everywhere while living with a philosophy. The question is: can one separate the karma from its results? Is one able to separate the result and one's ego? Is one able to understand what attachment is? If so, one can practise true karma yoga. When there is attachment to the fruits and results of life, it is karma. When one does not identify with or become attached to the fruits of karma and life, it is karma yoga.

What are the results of living with non-attachment?

Swami Sivananda: Attachment born of ignorance, selfishness and passion brings death with it, whereas non-attachment born of wisdom brings freedom with it. Non-attachment gives freedom from sorrow and makes a person absolutely bold and fearless. He who has no attachments can really love others, for his love is pure and divine. This is the master-key to open the realms of bliss. One should work incessantly without any attachment and identification. Non-attachment is an indispensable requisite in the practice of karma yoga. It elevates to sublime, magnanimous heights. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (3:19):

*Tasmaadasaktah satatam kaaryam karma samaachara;
Asakto hyaacharankarma paramaapnoti poorushah.*

Therefore, always perform action which should be done without attachment, for by performing action without attachment man reaches the Supreme.

Do people who are detached become socially irresponsible?

Swami Satyananda: Sri Krishna continually uses the word detachment throughout the *Bhagavad Gita* when discussing karma yoga, raja yoga, bhakti yoga and sannyasa. However, people always misinterpret detachment and connect it with carelessness and irresponsibility. This is a common criticism. Social irresponsibility does not arise from detachment; in

fact, exactly the opposite occurs. People who are detached in the real sense of the word become more responsible to society and humankind. In other words, one works better by being detached, and in this way everyone benefits more fully. The *Bhagavad Gita* (3:25) makes this point clear:

*Saktaah karmanyavidvaamso yathaa kurvanti bhaarata;
Kuryaadvidvaamstathaasaktashchikeershurlokasangraham.*

As the ignorant act from attachment to action, O Arjuna, so should the wise act without attachment, wishing for the welfare of the world.

Although the sannyasin lives in this world without attachments, he never acts carelessly or irresponsibly. Responsibility means 'the ability to respond'. It is detachment which enables the sannyasin to respond creatively to life's situations. Detachment is not listless non-involvement with life, but a living sacrifice. A person who is not motivated by thoughts of personal reward and has clear insight realizes his duty and does it. With detachment one strives for perfection, but without any expectation for the fruits or results of the work. A sannyasin can work far more efficiently and is able to shoulder a double workload because he is free from personal involvement and problems. A sannyasin works for the benefit of all, considering the work itself as sufficient cause or motive, and sharing the fruits from the work with others.

DUTY AND DHARMA

Is there a motto to help live life in harmony?

Swami Sivananda: Do your duty to the best of your ability and leave the rest to God.

How can one understand and relate to one's dharma?

Swami Satyananda: *Dharma* means those actions which are in accordance with one's mental and physical makeup. It implies actions which come naturally to an individual and

lead to harmony within the whole framework of the world. It can be roughly, though inadequately, translated as 'duty'. Dharma is not a subject that can be discussed in depth in general terms as the dharma of each individual is different. A few basic guidelines can be given to help recognize and tune in to one's dharma.

Dharma has to be discovered, accepted and lived by doing the work in hand to the best of one's ability and thinking of nothing but the work and not the fruits. Work can be done as worship if one is devotionally inclined. When one's dharma is lived one begins to harmonize both with the environment and the inner self. Doing one's dharma in conjunction with karma yoga can give the experience of higher states of awareness.

All work is the same; there is really no such thing as higher or lower work. Whether one uses the body or mind, it is still merely work; none is any better or worse than the other. It is society that has said that certain types of work are either good or bad, of high or low status. Work is work. There is no difference whether one builds a house, cleans a toilet, or rules a country. The tool of karma yoga is work; the aim is to become the perfect instrument.

If the aim is to make money, one should continue making money. If the desire is repressed externally, the mind will only make money mentally. Ambitions have to be fulfilled, but with as much awareness and detachment as possible. Peace of mind or higher awareness cannot be obtained by avoiding what the individual nature demands. The desire is only suppressed and causes more tension and unhappiness. One should dive into the turmoil of worldly activity and live out one's *samskaras*, but with full awareness. This is essential in order to jump out of the everlasting circle of aimless, egotistical activities.

No one should do the dharma of another person, even though he could do it better, or more easily. Helping someone by doing his work may lead to less obvious adverse repercussions, perhaps by making the person lazy or lose self-respect. Everyone should adhere to his *swadharma*, individual

dharma, along with the practice of karma yoga and move into the realms of higher experience and knowledge.

It is important to accept one's limitations and do the actions that seem most harmonious, even if contrary to the expectations of others. Too often actions are decided by others. People feel that they must do something, even though it may be contrary to their individual personality. They feel obliged to live up to other people's expectations and try to become something that they are not capable of. Unhappiness is the consequence. Choices should be positive, harmonious and in tune with one's dharma. The more one is able to become totally involved in the mode of activity, the better. The work acts as a vehicle and leads to one-pointedness of the mind. Problems start to fade away automatically. If one is half-hearted in action, the mind loses its power, is without concentration and tends to dither here and there. Work and dharma should be done with intensity and awareness. The work must seem right and capture one's interests. It doesn't matter what other people think.

It is better to do positive work than work with negative repercussions. Positive work not only benefits other people, but leads to a more relaxed mind and disposition. Positive or good actions are more conducive to progress in yoga. In a sense, so-called bad thoughts and acts, egotistical and non-dharmic, mould the character into a certain pattern. This leads to a destiny which is away from the path to higher awareness. On the other hand, good, selfless and dharmic thoughts and actions lead to a destiny which permits the influx of higher awareness.

The aim is to jump beyond the fetters of both good and bad, for they are only relative terms. Transcendence occurs in states of higher awareness, and its meaning is beyond the realm of intellectual discussion. Until these stages of illumination, however, one must try to substitute negative, adharmic actions by positive, dharmic actions. Disharmonious thoughts and actions have to be replaced by harmonious thoughts and actions. In a sense, one uses a

thorn (good actions) to remove another thorn (bad actions). Afterwards, both thorns are thrown away.

How can dharma be defined?

Swami Niranjanananda: Dharma is a form of understanding the scope of human interaction with society, nature and the divine. Ultimately, this is what matters in life. The other experiences, the pleasure, happiness, contentment, peace and bliss, or the suffering, pain, strife, disturbance and distress, are peripherals, temporary and transitory.

Dharma is the continuous, eternal interaction between the individual, nature and the divine. Dharma is perceived as having four stages. The first stage of dharma is creating a personal code of conduct in the interactions with family, friends and society, and in relation to the interaction with the world of senses. A code of conduct has to be followed in order to derive the maximum benefit from these interactions. An interaction should not become the cause of a head-trip, headache, dissatisfaction or dissent in life. The first evolute of dharma is the code of conduct for the entire society. Establishing systems, regulations and disciplines which are personal, social, national and global in nature is the first component of dharma.

In the second stage of dharma the individual realizes the commitment any interaction involves and the participation it demands. The individual has to do justice to that. In this stage one realizes the commitment one inherits through an interaction with friends, families and societies, and takes that commitment to its logical, positive conclusion for the benefit of all. The first two stages are the external behaviours of dharma, creating external order, system, harmony and peace.

Stage three is personal transformation, which comes with the realization of one's nature and what one can do to become better, happier, more fulfilled, content, creative and selfless. This personal change is what makes an individual a human being. The mind dictates through thoughts, desires,

aspirations and its own creation of needs. It dictates what an individual's behaviour has to be like in life. The dictates of the mind lead to a conditioned state of existence, which is recognized as a confined, restrictive, defined form, with less possibility of change. This state is known as *tamas*.

Tamas makes the focus go towards personal gratification and satisfaction. Sattwa makes the mind free from ambitions, desires, cravings and attachments. It brings freedom, peace and joy. Transformation takes place when a person moves from the state of *tamas* to a state of *sattwa* and becomes qualitatively better in thought, behaviour, performance, speech and living.

Until and unless this qualitative transformation happens, one cannot experience the transcendental nature and connect with the transcendental, divine power or cosmic power. The *tamasic* nature denies the existence of a cosmic power, and the *sattwic* nature enforces the existence of a cosmic power. For a person who is established in *sattwa*, material hypnosis has no meaning. One experiences the qualities of the spirit and not of matter. There has to be a shift from *tamas* to *sattwa*. Therefore, the third component of *dharma* is to make one a better, an enlightened individual.

The fourth stage of *dharma* is discovering the connection that one has with the supreme self, the transcendental self, the divine self, or God. The reality is that a connection happens between the individual and cosmic consciousness, and the fourth component of *dharma* is discovering the connection between individual and the divine. In this context, *dharma* is a tradition, a way of life, an understanding which applies knowledge in life.

What is swadharma?

Swami Sivananda: In order to evolve morally and spiritually certain important duties must be performed in the right manner. An aspirant must live according to the laws of God and know his duties. The duties which apply at a given time or stage in his growth are called *swadharma*. The aspirant can

make progress in life only by knowing and performing his swadharma diligently.

People have duties to their parents and other family members, to society and the country. They have a duty to their own self and, lastly, to God. They must fulfil these duties in life in order to progress and enjoy peace of mind.

It is a duty to serve one's parents with great faith and divine feeling. They should be worshipped as visible forms of God on earth. Many modern children do not pay attention to this duty.

People have to serve society according to their capacity, taste and nature. This helps not only in purifying the mind but also in ensuring the healthy growth and progress of society. They should serve with a selfless attitude, as honorary members, without expecting any reward for such service. Service of the country is service of mother Kali, it is pure Mother worship.

Anything done under compulsion or with expectation is not duty. Slavery should not be mistaken for duty; it is just self-created drudgery. The person who fears his boss every moment cannot pray for one second and has no time to read a single verse of the *Bhagavad Gita*. However, if swadharma is performed properly, it will take one towards God, which is the main purpose of this human birth. The foremost duty in life is to realize God, and anything that takes one away from God cannot be a duty.

How is sin defined in Indian scriptures?

Swami Satyananda: There are many misconceptions about sin. Indian scriptures in their characteristic, pragmatic, straight-to-the-point manner have given an excellent definition of sin or sinful action. Sin is that which detracts or leads one away from the path to harmony, knowledge and higher awareness. If a person performs his dharma and practises karma yoga, any action is automatically without sin. There is no absolute or fixed definition. An action done by one person with harmony can lead another away from harmony.

It is important not to become caught up in the intellectual definitions of sin that have plagued people with untold phobias and neuroses throughout history. Sin is merely that which leads one away from the path to enlightenment, nothing more.

How should duties be done?

Swami Satyananda: To live in the world as a witness is the royal road to happiness. One should not try to identify and establish relations with the changing insignificant affairs of this world. One should rise above sentiments and do one's duties.

The soldier who goes to battle acquires no sin in killing; in the same way one should consider oneself as the soldier of God. A physician who gives medicine to a patient is not tainted with sin if the patient dies. One should carry on with daily life and the objective of being serviceable to humankind while renouncing the feelings of happiness and misery. Being devoid of ego, the liberated souls have neither any selfish motive in good deeds nor are they harmed by bad deeds. The sadhaka who treads the path of karma yoga with detachment while surrendering the fruits of his actions to God is like the lotus in water; not bound by the fruits of good or bad actions.

How can an aspirant evolve in his present life?

Swami Niranjanananda: Problems arise when one confronts a reaction and reacts to reaction. When a karma is accepted and understood there is harmony, but when there is reaction against karma, problems arise.

The aspirant learns how to flow in life with ease and grace, understanding and wisdom by fine-tuning his nature and karmas, by cultivating a balanced attitude and awareness, and through the practices of yoga. This learning is known as karma yoga. It is harmony of karmas, which are performed unconsciously, subconsciously and consciously through the body, mind and ego. The aspirant learns from the different exposures he receives. When he is able to confront the exposures and crises that he encounters in

a positive way, it becomes a learning process. The aim is to follow the human dharma, not contradict it. When one follows the human dharma, one is free. If one does not follow dharma and does not apply *jnana*, wisdom, karma binds. Karma fructifies only when it is attached to dharma, one's duty. Sri Krishna goes so far as to say (3:35):

*Shreyaansvadharma vigunah paradharmaatsvanushthitaat;
Svadharme nidhanam shreyah paradharma bhayaavahah.*

Better is one's own duty, though devoid of merit, than the duty of another well discharged. Better is death in one's own duty; the duty of another is fraught with fear.

Therefore, to harmonize karmas the human dharma must be known first. Human dharma is the inherent responsibility. When karma and dharma unite, the karma changes and becomes *kartavya*, duty. In order to perform a karma as duty, it is necessary to attach it to dharma. The word dharma is not being used here in the sense of religion. *Dharma* is a natural responsibility. To come to terms with karma, duty has to be made the primary component and not the karma. When one attaches oneself to responsibility there is a beautiful union of karma and dharma. With this union, everything flows naturally, the plans are made, the actions are performed, the results come about and life progresses.

When a householder looks after his home and family and educates his children, he should do it as a duty. The feeling of kinship makes him constantly aware of what is going on. If something goes wrong, he is immediately involved and sees that involvement as his responsibility. If two members of the family fight, he tells them not to fight, and sees it as his responsibility to do so. He does not see it as karma. Therefore, any karma that brings out the dharma through which harmony and a positive environment are created is duty. Sage Vasishtha says in *Yoga Vasishtha* (5:6:11):

*Tamaanseeva divaa yaanti tatra dvandvaani sankshayam;
Sharadeeva ghanaastatra gunaa gachchhanti shuddhataam*

The defects of the dutiful and their pain and pleasure are all lost in their duty, as the darkness of night is dispelled by the light of day, and the clouds of the rainy season are dispersed in autumn.

To become a karma yogi is as simple as perfecting karma. It is to become like the tree which gives its fruits irrespective of who climbs up to pluck them, throws a stone to bring them down or cuts the tree to pick the fruits. In every condition, the duty of the tree is to give fruits. Nature always follows duty and a human being follows karma. Nature looks upon everyone equally, but a human being considers himself first on the basis of karmas. When duty is followed, everyone receives equal importance. The simple way to become a karma yogi is to connect the karmas with dharma. If one is able to see one's actions in life not as karma but as duty, one is a karma yogi. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (18:45, 18:47 and 18:48):

*Sve sve karmanyabhiratah samsiddhim labhate narah;
Svakarmaniratah siddhim yathaa vindati tachchhrinu.*

*Shreyaansvadharmo vigunah paradharmaatsvanushthithaat;
Svabhaavaniyatam karma kurvannaapnoti kilbisham.*

*Sahajam karma kaunteya sadoshamapi na tyajet;
Sarvaarambhaa hi doshena dhoomenaagnirivaavritaah.*

Each man, devoted to his own duty, attains perfection. How he attains perfection while being engaged in his own duty, hear now. (45)

Better is one's own duty (though) destitute of merits than the duty of another well performed. He who does the duty ordained by his own nature incurs no sin. (47)

One should not abandon, O Arjuna, the duty to which one is born, though faulty; for all undertakings are enveloped by evil, as fire by smoke! (48)

How do gurus live their karma and dharma?

Swami Niranjanananda: Gurus are enlightened people. They have already gone through the process, have realized the effects and benefits of the process, and have applied that wisdom, knowledge and understanding in their own relationships, interactions, character and behaviour. They have attained the state of peace, equilibrium and harmony and awakened their consciousness.

Most people live their karma and not their dharma, but gurus live their dharma and not their karma. Disciples live their karmas while the guru lives dharma, and it is the dharma which inspires the disciple to manage the karmas. These luminous, enlightened beings found a balance between their karma and dharma, and integrated them. After integrating the two aspects, they were equally at ease in material life and spiritual life, and became the first yogis.

If one is aware of one's dharma in day-to-day interactions, improvement in material life will happen. The awareness has to be cultivated of how to express one's dharma towards oneself, the family, society and towards the human civilization while living a normal life.

What is the difference between karma and duty?

Swami Satyananda: As a person advances in age, the organs of the body and senses become weaker and weaker. Therefore, when a person attains fifty years of age, he should gradually get rid of karmas, whether he is a sannyasin or a householder. However, this does not mean renunciation of duty. Karma is one thing and duty is another. After fifty years of age, whether one builds a house, an ashram, a temple, a hospital or does any good deed, one can do it in the form of duty, not in the form of karma.

When a person considers himself to be a doer, whatever he does is called karma due to attachment and ego problems. When a person considers himself to be a medium, whatever he does is called duty. This difference has to be kept in mind.

How can one know when to do one's duty and when to attend to spiritual life?

Swami Satyananda: The *Bhagavad Gita* is a dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, which takes place due to Arjuna's confusion about the relationship between worldly duties and higher knowledge. Like Arjuna, many people do not know how to relate higher knowledge with their every day life. Of course, people relate them intellectually in order to justify their existence and actions. They believe that this particular state of life with its limitations is somehow linked with and leading to higher knowledge. This is the subject matter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, a small book of seven hundred verses, and of another important but not so well-known book, the *Yoga Vasishtha*.

On the battlefield of the Mahabharata war, two armies were arrayed in front of each other. Arjuna, the disciple, is the commander-in-chief of one army, and Sri Krishna is driving his chariot. Arjuna refuses to fight, and he puts hard questions to Sri Krishna. "Lord, you take it for granted that I want to attain spiritual illumination, yet why do you insist that I commit these atrocities, making me fight my own relations? Does this life contribute to or contradict spiritual illumination? If I want to lead a spiritual life and have the light revealed, should I leave this lifestyle or continue living it?" The whole *Bhagavad Gita* was written in that context.

Arjuna is always hitting on one point: the highest realization is the most important factor in life. He feels that he must remove himself from duties and commitments for this purpose, even though he happens to be the commander-in-chief of an army on the battlefield. A person may be a commander-in-chief, prime minister or head of a household, but he should not try to realize the supreme goal of life by relinquishing duties.

People have never been able to convince themselves that this life is part of a higher life and not contradictory to it. However, highly spiritual people dedicate themselves

to spiritual realization and do not retreat from karma. Therefore, it is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (3:8):

Niyatam kuru karma tvam karma jyaayo hyakarmanah.

Perform the duty you are bound to, for action is superior to inaction.

Yoga Vasishtha is one of the most ancient and famous scriptures of India. The title literally means ‘Yoga of Rishi Vasishtha’, who was a great *rishi* or seer. He was the guru of Sri Rama and the family guru, *kula guru*, of a ruling dynasty of ancient India called the Solar dynasty. The scripture takes the form of a dialogue between Sri Rama and Sage Vasishtha concerning the dilemma of prince’s in his relationship with life.

The young Rama was sent to live with his guru for twelve years. On his return he began to neglect his daily duties and did not participate in family affairs. He became depressed and was not interested in his friends. He used to sit in his room, brood and lead an undisciplined life. His father, King Dasharatha, became perturbed and, summoning Rama, said, “My son, you have lived with your guru for twelve years. When you returned, we expected you to fulfil your commitments, obligations and responsibilities. What happened to make you completely withdraw and become disinterested in life?”

Sri Rama replied, “I am not interested in this world because everything here is evanescent. Every pleasure is temporary. I see no fun in relating with the frivolities of life. Why should I participate in life when it is so transitory? What is the use of pursuing the affairs of life if they are to come to an end? Life is so short and uncertain that one doesn’t know whether one will live for another second. The more karma one does, the more samskaras one develops. The more samskaras one develops, the more pain one has. The more pain one has, the greater are the anxieties and worries, and the more one is entangled in life and death. This endless circle never comes to an end. Therefore, I am withdrawing myself.”

Sri Rama's father became worried and requested Sage Vasishtha to set his son's philosophy in order. This dialogue is the text of the *Yoga Vasishtha*. The question is raised as to whether doing one's duties or renunciation is more conducive to spiritual illumination. Sage Vasishtha says (5:17:2-6):

*Praakritaanyeva karmaani yayaa varjitavaanchhayaa;
Kriyante trishnayemaani taam jeevanmuktataam viduh.*

*Yaa sthitistrishnayaa jantorbaahyaarthe baddhabhaavayaa;
Tam bandhamaahuraachaaryaah samsaaranigadam dridham.*

*Noonamujjhitasankalpaa hridi baahye vihaarinee;
Vaasanaa yoditaa seha jeevanmuktashareerinee.*

*Baahyaarthavyasanochchhoonaa trishnaa baddheti raaghava;
Sarvaarthavyasanonmuktaa trishnaa mukteti kathiyate.*

*Poorvam yasyaastu trishnaayaa vartamaane'pi shaashvatee;
Nirduhkhataa nishkalataa saa mukteti budhaih smritaa.*

The desire to do one's duties without expectation of their reward is also called the living liberation, and the doers of their respective duties are said to be the living liberated. (2)

The dependence of beings on their desires, and their strong attachment to external objects, is called their bondage to this world by the teachers. (3)

But the desire to conduct one's self according to the course of events, without any expectation of fruition, constitutes jivanmukti. (4)

The desire to enjoy external objects is truly the bondage of the soul; indifference to worldly enjoyments constitutes freedom in life. (5)

Want of greediness and anxiety prior to and on account of some gain, and absence of mirth and change in one's disposition afterwards; is the true freedom of men. (6)

If this world is not the ultimate reality, why should karma yoga be practised?

Swami Sivananda: No one can live even for one second without action. *Prakriti*, nature, drives everyone to action, even against their will. Life cannot be lived without action. He is a hypocrite who thinks about the sense objects but remains inactive physically. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (3:6):

*Karmendriyaani samyamya ya aaste manasaa smaran;
Indriyaarthaanvimumoodhaatmaa mithyaachaarah sa uchyate.*

He of deluded understanding, who, restraining the organs of action, sits thinking of the sense objects in the mind, is called a hypocrite.

The *Bhagavad Gita* stresses the performance of duty without reluctance. There is no need to desist from an action which one has undertaken. Action does not bind the soul, which is not affected by any external modification, for the self is eternal. In order to attain success in yoga, practice is necessary. By contemplating in a closed room for years, one may not advance more than a few steps, because perfection or freedom from the effects of karma cannot be reached by merely renouncing action.

A sadhaka who confines himself to a solitary cell and takes to repeating vedantic formulae in order to experience the higher self or the unreality of the world runs the risk of becoming indolent, eccentric and intolerant instead. By atrophy he will lose what good traits he had previously. Many aspirants become tamasic by shirking work and taking exclusively to japa and meditation for which they are not ready. A long stay in caves makes them tamasic and unfit for energetic, active service of humanity. In the *Yoga Vasishtha* (3:88:11) it is said:

*Yathapraaptam hi kartavyamasaktena sadaa sataa;
Mukurenaakalankena pratibimbakriyaa yathaa.*

Do your duty as it may present itself to you, rather than remaining inactive doing nothing. The dull person is like a dirty mirror, which does not reflect the image, and comes to no use at all.

A recluse feels afraid when he sees a big crowd or a group of ladies. A little sound throws him off balance. The yogi who keeps up meditation while performing actions is a powerful yogi indeed. He has a different mind altogether. He has no *vikshepa*, or tossing of the mind, while a recluse is easily disturbed by a little sound or the bustle of the city. A recluse in the forest has to test his real inner strength by occasional visits to the plains and service of humanity. It is wrong to suppose that the divine cannot be attained while living an active life and performing one's duties.

If karma creates bondage, shouldn't active involvement in the world be renounced?

Swami Satyananda: The *Bhagavad Gita* deals with exactly the same question which Arjuna put before Sri Krishna: "The chain of action and reaction is continuously growing. Karma creates bondage, love creates bondage, relations create bondage, and responsibilities create more karma. By working I accumulate karma, and by karma I am again bound to one incarnation after another incarnation. Therefore, I must sever the attachment to wife, children, money, assets and everything else and have nothing more to do with them."

Sri Krishna said, "No, this is not only a wrong proposition, but a dangerous and anti-spiritual proposition, as no one can renounce karma. By renouncing duties and obligations, one makes no spiritual progress as long as attachment is within."

Renunciation of action can be just an act of escapism. Therefore, in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna said that it is foolish and ignorant to think that one can attain higher states or spiritual salvation by renouncing duties.

How does Sri Krishna explain the role of duty in life?

Swami Niranjanananda: Sri Krishna says to Arjuna, “In life, only the karma that each person has to perform is relevant, and that karma is performed according to his destiny. If you think that you can control another person’s karma, you are wrong. If each person has to live his destiny, each one has to follow his karma, too. Therefore, karma is not to be negated in life; instead the performance of every karma has to be accepted as a duty and obligation.”

Soldiers, doctors, engineers and parents have to perform their karma as duty. As long as their karma is performed as a duty with proper consideration, awareness, wisdom and clarity there is no sin in anything. However, if karmas are performed guided by ambitions and desires, the negative colouring comes into their fold. The tamasic and rajasic colourings dissipate mental clarity. With dissipation of mental clarity people fall into depression and deep dejection. Therefore, they should keep the mind balanced, do their karma realizing it to be a duty, and in keeping mental balance they will attain the state of yoga.

How can one live one’s dharma?

Swami Niranjanananda: Dharma is the responsibility inherent in every interaction, the inherent commitment that an individual feels when relating to everything outside. This creative expression of dharma makes one free from mental and emotional strife.

One has to observe the reactions, responses, interactions and communications and be aware of each and every word that one says before it is spoken. One has to cultivate this awareness, realize one’s interaction with the world, other people and society, and regulate this behaviour. Regulating one’s behaviour is following dharma. Irregular, eccentric behaviour is not dharma. When the expressions are regulated, whether through the senses, mind, emotions or intellect, they bring peace, and do not distract or divert the attention into many areas.

What is the secret to inner peace?

Swami Satyananda: Inner peace is a balanced vision of life. It is not subject to achievements and losses. Inner peace is an understanding of everything in life. External life is full of ups and downs, and for a weak person it sometimes becomes tiring and exhausting. For a strong person, every ascent is a joy and every descent is a game.

Peace has to be achieved within life, and life is based on matter. There is no possibility of withdrawing from life. One may be able to withdraw from the external aspects, but one cannot withdraw from the awareness of matter.

In India this problem has been discussed for the last five to ten thousand years. Some thinkers said, "Withdraw yourself and inner peace will come to you." But what is the fun of having inner peace? Other thinkers said, "Live life in the world and think that it is inner peace." But how is peace within disturbances possible? As a result of these discussions, religions arose one after another.

Finally, a note was struck in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the philosophy of renunciation within action and inner peace during fulfilment of duties. It is not possible to achieve inner peace by renouncing karmas. As long as the mind broods over material pleasures which it does not experience, it is hypocritical. If life is lived in its fullness, meaning the senses, mind and matter are accepted, if a relationship with material life has been defined and everything classified properly, one knows how far one can go.

This particular yoga is the yoga of active detachment. If a person works in a bank and spends the whole day counting money, how much is received and how much is paid out doesn't affect him, no matter how many thousands of dollars it is. However, if he earns one hundred and twenty dollars a week, a little more or a little less does affect him. What is personal has an effect and what is impersonal does not.

This life must therefore be lived. Inner peace comes when one accepts whatever happens, and everything in life becomes impersonal. That is the secret. Peace of mind is not

the ultimate state. The ultimate is to realize one's real being, the supreme consciousness. Inner peace or happiness is only a means to an end.

What does the Bhagavad Gita mean by renouncing actions?

Swami Satyananda: The name of the eighteenth chapter is 'Moksha Karma Sannyasa Yoga', renunciation of action and liberation. Scholars say that renunciation of selfish motivation is renunciation. Others say that renunciation of the world itself is renunciation. Yet others claim that only those actions must be renounced that are not conducive to human welfare, or which create difficulties for others. It is up to each individual to think about how and what he should renounce: renunciation of ill motives or renunciation of action itself.

Sri Krishna suggests so many possibilities, but Arjuna finds them hard. Sri Krishna says it is not necessary to renounce productive, charitable and helpful works. It is not necessary to renounce acts which purify the body and mind. The wise one should continue to work, carrying out obligations and duties, and not neglect what is expected of him. He explains obligatory actions or duties in the light of the three gunas, saying (18:7-8):

*Niyatasya tu sannyasaah karmano nopapadyate;
Mohaattasya parityaagastaamasah parikeertitah.*

*Duhkhamityeva yatkarma kaayakleshabhayaattyajet;
Sa kritvaa raajasam tyaagam naiva tyaagaphalam labhet.*

Verily, the renunciation of obligatory action is improper; abandoning the same from delusion is declared to be tamasic. (7)

He who abandons action on account of the fear of bodily trouble does not obtain the merit of renunciation by doing such rajasic renunciation. (8)

As a housewife or an office clerk, a ruler of a country or a commander-in-chief of an army, everyone should carry

out the duties they have agreed to perform. This world is the *dharmakshetra*, the battlefield of life, where one can work for oneself and for others. Sri Krishna says that one should not renounce duties and responsibilities, but learn how to separate oneself from the influence of their results. Renunciation is not freedom. If one feels that compassion, mercy, grace or helping others is one's duty, it is karma yoga. According to the *Bhagavad Gita*, abstaining and refraining from one's duties and responsibilities is living a half life.

What is the outcome of acting with a sense of duty?

Swami Niranjanananda: When action is performed with the idea of duty it produces a deep experience of bhakti, surrender, belief, trust and faith in a higher nature, a higher reality which is guiding everything. This duty is to be understood in relation to the individual, social, global and universal dharma. When a person develops the awareness of dharma as an inherent commitment, duty or obligation towards other beings, he develops a giving or helping nature.

Often people want to give others a helping hand, but their actions may carry with them some thought of gain or profit. The action should not be restricted by the idea of personal gain. Helping others is in itself a dharma.

What is the link between karma and dharma?

Swami Satyananda: Newton defined the idea of karma for science: for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. As a person does and thinks, so he becomes, at least on a mind-body level. If a person thinks and acts selfishly, he will tend to become more selfish in the course of time. If he is greedy, after a while greed will become the predominant aspect of his personality and his ego drives will be intensified in order to satisfy his greed. In this manner, the thoughts and aspirations of the mind flow most easily in the direction to which it has been habituated.

The mountain streams of the monsoon rainfall follow the riverbeds that have been carved out by previous downpours.

The mental desires prevent the influx of meditation, for they tend to increase the power of the individual ego. The aim of karma yoga is to follow one's dharma, which tends to diminish ego identification. The aim of karma yoga is to follow the dictates of the individual constitution, those actions which come naturally without effort. This type of karma is dharma and reduces the bondage of the ego. If one does one's dharma with awareness, one automatically starts to harmonize with the environment, and there is less mental tension and conflict.

An action is only correct if it is the right action for a person under the given circumstances. The same action may be wrong for another person under the same or different circumstances. Actions can only lead to higher experiences and enlightenment if they are done as karma yoga.



2

Two Qualities

EFFICIENCY

What is yoga?

Swami Sivananda: Yoga is a way of life, not something that is divorced from life. Yoga is not forsaking action, but efficient performance in the right spirit. Yoga is not running away from home and human habitation, but a process of moulding an attitude to home and society with a new understanding. Yoga is not a turning away from life; yoga makes life spiritual.

Equanimity is yoga. Serenity is yoga. Skill in action is yoga. Control of the senses and the mind is yoga. Anything by which the best and highest in life can be attained is yoga. Yoga is something that has to be assimilated and put into practice in daily life. Yoga is all-embracing, all-inclusive and universal in its application.

What is the quality of your involvement with work?

Swami Sivananda: Whenever I take up some work, I finish it at any cost. Whenever I start writing a book, I complete it somehow. Whenever I take up a book for study, I complete it before taking up another work. I never leave anything half-done. I concentrate on the subject and think intensely without distraction. I am firm, steadfast and steady. I have intense application for work, tenacity and intensity of purpose.

What is the importance of involvement and efficiency in karma yoga?

Swami Satyananda: The crafts and skills I have learned or developed, whether it is writing, speaking, managing, administering, organizing, teaching or propagating have been accomplished through my total and complete involvement in the activities and affairs of the ashram. The *Bhagavad Gita* (2:50) has defined karma yoga as ‘efficiency in action’ – *yoga karmasu kaushalam*:

*Buddhiyukto jahaateeha ubhe sukritadushkrite;
Tasmaadyogaaya yujyasva yogah karmasu kaushalam.*

Endowed with wisdom, evenness of mind, one casts off in this life both good and evil deeds; therefore, devote yourself to yoga; yoga is skill in actions.

In karma yoga, the practitioner sets out to do his work and duties with as much attention and involvement as possible. He attempts to achieve maximum efficiency, using his inherent skills and abilities. This total absorption in the work at hand leads to greater willpower and unleashes the powers within the mind.

The more a person gives himself to a task, the less he thinks of himself and the more he feels himself to be part of a bigger entity, which is not concerned only with him, but with everyone and everything. This inner attention to a task is an intensive absorption, and is really a meditation practice. The mind and body become integrated and tuned to a high degree of sensitivity, and the state of meditation can be experienced. The mind is purified when duties are performed efficiently, and the path towards bhakti yoga is easy. The practitioner should strive for perfection in every action. That is the yoga of efficiency.

Why is it necessary to be fully involved in the work when practising karma yoga?

Swami Sivananda: Work should not be done hurriedly or in a careless half-hearted manner without taking any interest.

One must completely engross and saturate oneself in service. Half-hearted service is no service at all. No one can evolve with such an attitude. The heart, mind, intellect and soul must be in the work, and only then can it be called karma yoga. Some people have their hands at the work, their mind in the market, their intellect in the office and their soul with their wife or son. This is the reason why they do not realize any substantial progress on their path. This sort of approach will not help a person evolve.

One should be absorbed in work, do it with devotion and not care for the results. Without a thought for success or failure one must have complete confidence and always be cheerful. This is the secret to success.

How can karma become karma yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: One of the requisites of karma yoga is to focus and become one-pointed, engrossed and totally involved, head, heart and soul, in one act. In the world everybody is performing action, but no one is connected with the action. A person works in the office, but is not really connected to the work in the office. Someone may work in an ashram, sweeping the floor, typing in the office or teaching a class, yet not be really connected. That is only karma, not karma yoga. The moment the word yoga is added to karma, the total concept changes.

Everyone performs action. People work in the family, the office and society to maintain themselves. Work is done to fulfil expectations, ambitions and desires, and to have a degree of satisfaction in life, saying, “I have done my good deed for the day.” Everyone works in order to obtain a return from the work. Throughout life, desires and expectations, ambitions and greed direct the actions. The search for happiness, whether sensual or something different, directs the actions.

If everything is being done for oneself, it is only karma. Even the asana that is practised to reduce the tummy and beautify the hip line is karma; it is not sadhana. Even the

practices of meditation done for stress relief are actually karma, not sadhana, due to the expectation of mental relaxation and relief from stress. Even in meditation one looks for relaxation and release of stress, not for spiritual development. Therefore, most people never perform karma yoga in their lives, but only karma. Even in the ashram people practise karma, not karma yoga.

Although karma yoga is spoken about, few understand how to practise it. It is difficult to practise, as it requires involvement. For example, while gossiping with somebody, one is totally involved for five or ten minutes, one or two hours. The subject matter is so interesting and absorbing that one is unable to extract oneself and the sense of time is lost. That happens when an association with something enjoyable takes place. When an association with something disgusting takes place, spending half a minute is a punishment.

In karma yoga the mind is totally focused on one act. It is difficult to sweep the same floor for fifteen years without becoming bored after a few days and neglecting the job. Anyone would be totally bored sweeping the same room, the same building and the same road after a week, a month, or a year. That is karma. However, the action of sweeping can become a new act every day if one is able to remain so focused that nothing else exists at the time of sweeping. That action is recognized as a process of self-development and true karma yoga.

In karma yoga one is able to develop new methods of performance to expand one's creativity, feel involvement, and be joyous in that process of action rather than finding fault with it. Karma yoga is not just doing something with awareness, but total involvement of head, heart and hands in the fulfilment of an act. In the practice of karma yoga, actions should be performed with total participation, without any expectation and with utmost perfection. A person who can incorporate these three ideas into any activity at any time finds great happiness, peace and enjoyment. When this happens, life becomes a sadhana.

Why do people become bored?

Swami Satyananda: Every day one does the same things. For three hundred and sixty-five days of the year, one eats in the same kitchen, goes to the same toilet, uses the same bath, and one has to repeat this for eighty years, if one lives that long. Therefore, everyone seeks to escape into the sensualities of life. The victims of life's sensualities are those seeking escape from monotony and boredom. However, for brave people, life is an adventure and every adventure is a novelty.

How can boredom be overcome?

Swami Niranjanananda: If a person thinks that whatever work he is doing, it is for the first and last time, that this is the only time he will ever do it, and gives it his best shot – that is karma yoga. I have lived in the ashram since my birth, but I am not bored with the routine. After some time most people who come to stay in the ashram say, “Oh, every day it is the same thing, waking up in the morning, having breakfast, doing seva, having lunch, doing seva. After some time it becomes boring, and I need to have a change to overcome the boredom.” Many times I have asked myself, “Have I ever demanded or needed a change?” No, because each day is a new day for me. What I do today has no relation to what I did yesterday, and what I do tomorrow will have no connection with what I do today.

If I am sweeping the same corner in the ashram every day, each day it is for the first time in my life. I may be familiar with every nook and cranny of the space, but when I look there, I always see it for the first time. Therefore, my involvement and participation is total and I don't feel bored. I have never experienced a moment in my life feeling bored. I am trying to live this principle of karma yoga, so that every day is a new day and my involvement is always unique for that moment, and not repeated again.

This attitude has been cultivated. I have experienced it, because I started off from the grassroots. Therefore, karma

yoga is not just hard physical work, but knowing that one's involvement demands full awareness, attention, creativity and expression, each and every moment. As a side effect of that, one develops immunity to one's expectations, desires, ambitions, losses and gains. It creates immunity to the results, reactions and responses of an action. If a person can develop this immunity, he will be able to face shocks in a much more balanced way.

Total involvement is necessary so that one can express absolute creativity in that moment. Swami Vivekananda said, "If the painter loses the consciousness of his ego and becomes completely immersed in his painting, he will be able to produce masterpieces." Karma yoga becomes the medium through which one can come to this level of creativity and participation. It becomes part of the lifestyle of one who aspires to become a yogi in the course of time.

How can skill in action be applied while doing one's duties?

Swami Sivananda: According to the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:50), skill in action is karma yoga. It is a great art. A person has to take as much interest in each daily action as an artist takes in his paintings. The artist uses the brush after keen deliberation. His entire being is focused on the painting, and he works self-forgetfully. This should be one's attitude. One should take interest in all that one does and be detached from the actions at the same time. A person must do all work efficiently and perfectly. The motto should be: "One thing at a time and that done well – is a very good rule as many can tell."

If one's guru or friend asks for a towel to be washed, also take his clothes for washing without his knowledge. If the preceptor says, "Bring me some groundnut oil," the disciple should find the oil in the twinkling of an eye and take it to him in a cup. He should run to him with the cup in hand, with panting breath, with the body bathed in perspiration. If a passer-by asks for a cup of water, always

say to him with courtesy, in sweet words, “Brother, take your seat. Here is water. Here is a cup of milk for you. Rest awhile on this seat. I shall massage your legs and fan you. You are tired.” This is real service; this is real yoga. If an aspirant does service with this mental attitude for one or two years, he will become an entirely changed person, a veritable god-man on this earth.

The aspirant should not do anything in a scurry, haste or flurry. He should do every bit of work with a cool, unruffled mind. He should be perfectly accurate in doing any kind of work, collect his scattered thoughts and apply his full mind to the work at hand. Many people spoil their work by doing it in haste, without reflection or consideration. They repent later on and this is bad. One should take one’s time and do the work well, with accuracy, in a dextrous and masterly manner. One should conserve and regulate one’s energy. Do not allow any energy to be unnecessarily frittered away, but use it for good purposes to bring the most good to a great number of people. This is skill in action.

How can skill in action be developed?

Swami Satyananda: The western philosopher Heidegger has written: “The artist must turn himself to that which wants to be revealed and permit the process to happen through him.” The karma yogi becomes an artist in everything he does. He develops the perception and intuition of an artist, whether he is working in the garden, eating, singing, typing or writing. Everything is done as though he is an artist, painting a masterpiece. He does his work, no matter how seemingly trivial, as though he were creating a work of art. He treats the world stage as his studio and tries to achieve perfection in everything he does. He allows action to happen through the body and mind without any effort. Ideally, action should only happen. A karma yogi tries to become a perfect vessel for the expression of consciousness in the world arena. This is karma yoga.

What is perfection in action, and how can it be attained?

Swami Niranjanananda: Perfection in action is using one's full creativity and giving it one's best. There should be awareness of action. Extending the awareness into action makes one perform that action with the idea of perfection. Perfection does not mean that things have to be done in a certain form; the concept of perfection changes from person to person. The same action can be performed by twenty different people, and they will have twenty different concepts of perfection. This is a lesson that can be derived from God. He has a factory to manufacture human beings. There are billions of people on this planet and no two are alike; each face is different. However, when a person has to manufacture something, he makes one mould and everything comes out exactly the same. That is his idea of perfection; everything has to be identical.

Another concept of perfection is the multifarious, and also nefarious, nature or prakriti. There is so much variety in nature. Each human being, each blade of grass, each flower, each animal and bird is different. Is that imperfection or perfection? From the yogic perspective and God's perspective, perfection means making everything unique and giving it one's best. A person's creativity is seen in this way. When one is able to express one's creativity in action, it is known as perfect action. When a person becomes one with the action and it is not a mechanical process, it is known as perfect action. This is an attitude, an effort and a sadhana. Perfection in sadhana is not a concept.

How does a karma yogi deal with temptations and distractions?

Swami Satyananda: Rather than going out to amuse himself, the karma yogi finds it more exciting to carry out a task, to forget a problem by working or to overcome physical or psychological problems through work. There are few temptations for a person who tackles a task with his life and soul. Wasting time in extracurricular activities is the

greatest of all earthly sins. Breaking the faith of God is an untold mishap and idly wasting time is the worst form of liability.

How can one become efficient?

Swami Niranjanananda: The first attribute of karma yoga is efficiency. Actions performed by the body and mind should happen spontaneously and be done with total efficiency. This efficiency involves full concentration and awareness of mind. If there is no concentration and awareness, there will be no efficiency either. It is not necessary to have extraordinary skills in order to be efficient, but it is necessary to be keen, have awareness and concentration, be one-pointed and not distracted. One must be able to observe the whole event or situation in order to become efficient.

How can efficiency be lived in relationships and interactions with others?

Swami Niranjanananda: The concept of karma yoga is defined in the third chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, which identifies relationships and interactions. Sri Krishna explains how one is able to create a relationship at a given moment and how efficient one can be in that relationship, so that there are no shortcomings or faults. Efficiency in whatever role one has is the message of karma yoga given in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Sri Krishna is considered as God, but once upon a time he lived a life in a physical body. Imagine the variety and number of roles he played in that body, right from the time of his birth till the time of his departure. Each role he played with efficiency. He played the role of a son to both his mothers. He played the role of a lover to the gopis, plus his own wives, who numbered in the thousands according to the story. He played the roles of friend, guardian, guide, guru, brother and nephew to perfection. Nowhere can a fault in his character be found. To attain that level of perfection there must be complete mastery over the character, and that gives efficiency in every role.

Most people lack efficiency and they tend to react to this deficiency. People interact with each other according to their character. Sometimes there is cooperation, harmony and happiness, sometimes misunderstanding, fear, aggression and anxiety. In each role a person usually becomes affected by the result. If one becomes angry, frightened or happy, it has an effect. There is total involvement when going through pain and pleasure, attraction and repulsion, *raga* and *dvesha*. This limits a person to a confined area without the ability to look outside.

Yoga says that if one is seeing only an aspect of oneself, one should move out of that area into another dimension in order to see a better and bigger part of oneself. If a person is aware of that bigger part, he can play his role with greater efficiency, in a much more detached way. A doctor has to treat the patient in a detached way; he cannot become subjective or develop an association or a relationship. In the same way, an administrator has to deal with people in an objective way. The moment they associate in any other way, they are not able to maintain an impartial view. Their perception and vision is clouded. A sannyasin also has to maintain an objective viewpoint. The moment one becomes a slave to reaction, there is a setback in the frame of consciousness. This kind of setback is not wanted; one always wants to evolve and be in harmony.

Everyone wants to be efficient; it is a basic nature or quality of consciousness. Efficiency in action is defined as yoga; that is one view. After all, everyone is efficient in their profession or trade. A surgeon is efficient in performing surgery. A doctor is efficient in general practice or as a specialist. Most people are experts in their trade. A guru is an expert in the trade of guru, and similarly, a disciple should be an expert in the trade of a disciple. Sri Krishna went through the experiences of life and said that it is not the action that is important; it is how a person participates in the action. When one participates fully and objectively in an action, the perfection attained in that action is yoga.

Most people are concerned only with their own spheres of action. They are unable to be part of a bigger whole and be responsible for their actions, participation and involvement. In a family each member is equally responsible for what happens to the others and to the house. Similarly, each person in a community, an ashram, or any trade is responsible. Sri Krishna pointed out that efficient involvement in action is not becoming subject to action, but a guide to action.

How can an ordinary person learn to live for others?

Swami Satyananda: Each person evolves according to his personality. While evolving, however, it should be remembered that one's life is for others. A person who lives only for himself is not human or animal. Has anyone ever seen a hen eating another hen? Living for oneself, earning for oneself and enjoying one's earnings for oneself are not the signs of a human being. People have bound themselves with the cords of selfishness. Whether or not one can do something about it is a different matter. When the bridge to Lanka was being built for Sri Rama's army, the squirrels made a humble contribution. They would pick up a little sand and drop it on the bridge that was under construction. The bridge could not have been built without the sand that they brought. They were filled with *bhakti*, devotion and dedication to the Lord's work. The intensity of feeling within is the most important component.

The tree brings forth fruit for others. A mango tree does not eat its own fruit. Grains, vegetables, flowers and fruits grow in abundance for others to eat. Everything lives, thrives and grows for others. Only man lives selfishly for himself. He earns only for his own children and keeps clinging to them selfishly. Whoever lives for others is dedicated to others. One who is selfless is selfless towards one and all. One who is charitable is charitable towards one and all. One who is a well-wisher is a well-wisher to all. He lives for one and all without exception.

How is this perfection in action to be achieved? It requires purity of love and devotion, freedom from doubt, complete surrender and total respect for whatever one is doing and whatever one wants. Through the power of love anything impossible becomes possible. Through the power of devotion free from doubt, one can cross the ocean. Through the power of surrender, one can climb the highest mountain. Everyone has the qualities of devotion and surrender, but no one knows how to use them properly. That is what one learns while serving and helping others and not expecting anything in return. Love and devotion gradually become free from doubt, and one is able to use one's love, devotion and surrender more and more.

When a person is doing anything, anywhere, he surrenders to it. When there is devotion for one's actions, one becomes aware of what one is doing, and one can learn how to do things without being taught. With surrender and devotion one becomes aware of the thoughts, reasoning and feelings of others. One can understand the psychology of others, and how they can be helped. It is not through magic that one can help others. There is a greater magician inside, which costs no money and for which no time need be wasted.

One can help others, cure others and make others satisfied and tranquil by one's own magic, which is the quality of devotion and surrender. When all actions are done with devotion and surrender there is no duality, no hatred, jealousy or anger. It is easy to practise for those who are really eager to help, and by helping another, one is helping oneself.

How does this feeling of karma yoga arise?

Swami Satyananda: Although effort must be applied in the early stages of karma yoga, eventually it arises spontaneously. There is an excellent Sanskrit and Hindi word called *bhava*, which means a feeling, an attitude that springs up from the depths of one's being. It is not a hypocritical or false feeling; it is a feeling that arises from the essence

of one's nature. It is an expression of higher knowledge, although it is neither pious nor artificial. Due to higher awareness and realization of the deeper relationships with other people, one actually wants to give as much as one can to others. There is no choice, and no effort is required. In the beginning karma yoga requires effort and cultivation, but the advent of higher understanding transforms karma yoga into a spontaneous expression of bhava. There is no longer any practice as such, for one begins to radiate real karma yoga.

EQUANIMITY

How can balance be described?

Swami Sivananda: Just as water remains unaffected on the lotus leaf, just as oil floats upon the surface of the water without being affected in any way, so one should remain in the world amidst pleasures and difficulties. Just as the tongue is not affected by taking ghee, one should remain unaffected amidst worldly activities and troubles. One may fail to keep the balance a thousand and one times, but in the long run one is bound to succeed with persistence in one's practice and discipline of the mind. Every failure is a pillar for future success.

A karma yogi should not expect any return of love, appreciation, gratitude or admiration from the people he is serving. He must be balanced in success or failure, gain or loss, victory or defeat. He must be free from *raga* and *dvesha*, likes and dislikes.

What attitude expresses a sense of balance?

Swami Satyananda: An Urdu poet beautifully described the attitude one must have in order to live with balance and joy:

*If the Lord desired, I prostrated myself.
If He removed me from household duties,
I sat there abandoning all.*

*To whichever side He turned me, I sat there refraining.
If a rag was prepared, I sat down wearing it.
If favoured with a shawl, I was pleased with it.
Only those people are perfect
Who rejoice in every state of life.*

What is the importance of equanimity?

Swami Sivananda: Worldly people are generally elated by success and depressed by failure. Elation and depression are attributes of the mind. If one wants to become a real karma yogi, one will have to keep a balanced mind at all times, in all conditions and under all circumstances. This is no doubt difficult, but it has to be done anyhow. It has to be achieved through constant practice. Only then one will have peace of mind and real lasting happiness. One who keeps a balanced mind is a jnani. Karma yoga prepares the mind for the attainment of *jnana*, wisdom. That is the beauty of karma yoga, its secret and essence. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (13:9):

*Asaktiranabhishvanganah putradaaragrihaadishu;
Nityam cha samachittatvamishtaanishtopattishu.*

Non-attachment, non-identification of the Self with son, wife, home and the rest, and constant even-mindedness in the attainment of the desirable and the undesirable is knowledge.

A karma yogi must be balanced in success or failure, gain or loss, victory or defeat. He must be free from *raga* and *dvesha*, attraction and repulsion. Merit and demerit, *punya* and *papa*, do not affect him. He has perfected evenness or equanimity of mind, and does not exult over the good fruit of merit or worry over the negative fruit of demerit. His mind rests in God all the time. This kind of yoga is inculcated by Sri Krishna in his teachings in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:48):

*Yogasthah kuru karmaani sangam tyaktvaa dhananjaya;
Siddhyasiddhyoh samo bhootvaa samatvam yoga uchyate.*

Perform action, O Arjuna, being steadfast in yoga, abandoning attachment and balanced in success and failure! Evenness of mind is called yoga.

Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that when performing action, one should not be concerned about the fruit of the action, like gain and loss, victory and defeat. These are in the hands of the Lord. One should perform action with a balanced mind, calmly enduring the pairs of opposites, like heat and cold, pleasure and pain, which inevitably manifest during action. Sri Krishna advises Arjuna to fight free from the desire for the acquisition or preservation of the kingdom (2:38, 4:22):

*Sukhaduhkhe same kritvaa laabhaalaabhau jayaajayau;
Tato yuddhaaya yujyasva naivam paapamavaapsyasi.*

Having made pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat the same, engage in battle for the sake of battle; thus you shall not incur sin. (2:38)

*Yadrichchhaalaabhasantushtho dvandvaateeto vimatsarah;
Samah siddhaavasiddhau cha kritvaapi na nibadhyate.*

Content with what comes without effort, free from the pairs of opposites and envy, even-minded in success and failure, though acting, the yogi is not bound. (4:22)

Actions of a binding nature lose their hold when done with evenness of mind and pure reason, which is free from attachment and rests in the higher self. The karma yogi who possesses evenness of mind casts off the fruits of actions and escapes from good and bad births. Clinging to the fruit is the cause of rebirth. God has given this marvellous body to man in order to serve humanity and thereby attain immortal life. If he uses this body for the satisfaction of petty desires and selfish ends, he is caught up in the wheel of birth and death and becomes an object of pity and condemnation.

The karma yogi who practises equanimity or evenness of mind understands fully the fundamental principles that

govern bodily actions. He performs actions for God's sake in order to fulfil His purpose, without desire for the fruit, and eventually attains everlasting peace. He who is established in the yoga of equanimity becomes an expert in the science of karma yoga.

What are the steps to achieve equanimity?

Swami Niranjanananda: Most people are swept away by their moods, always swinging this way and that. Five thousand years ago Sri Krishna said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:48), “*Samatvam yoga uchayate* – Equanimity is the highest yoga.” How many people have been able to live equanimity in these five thousand years? How many among the millions of people in this world possess equanimity? Only a person who walks in awareness can attain the state of equanimity. Such a person is a yogi, a sadhaka, a spiritual practitioner. Those who are not aware cannot possess equanimity.

The *Bhagavad Gita* has been chanted for the last five thousand years by millions and many have spoken and written on its philosophy; however, they are not able to apply the philosophy in their lives. As they are not aware, they are not accomplished spiritually and they are not yogis. They are immersed in the material world. Therefore, all that is written in the *Bhagavad Gita* sounds good, but no one is able to incorporate it in their life. It is the human weakness. The yogis say that one is able to attain equanimity only when one is able to adjust with the *dvaita* or dual state of mind – the fluctuation between the opposite states of joy and sorrow, gain and loss, heat and cold. When one is able to live properly and peacefully within the limits of one's capabilities, equanimity is attained.

The biggest sadhana in life is adjustment. Reaction is a behaviour which arises spontaneously. It is natural to react to situations automatically. The method of training the mind to break free of its reactive nature is *samatvam*, and before *samatvam* comes adjustment. Equanimity can only be acquired by adjusting to the mind. One cannot attain

equanimity by opposing the mind. The aspirant has to learn the methods to adjust and compromise so that he can keep the mind balanced throughout gain and loss, good and bad, and continue to march ahead. This will bring about equanimity in life.

How can balance of mind be attained?

Swami Sivananda: Balance of mind brings about real lasting happiness for a disciplined person. It is not a commodity which can be purchased in the market. It is indeed a rare gift which can only be attained by protracted selfless service with equal vision, controlled senses and self-restraint, by developing virtues such as adaptability, tolerance and a high degree of endurance, serenity, calmness, control of temper and by removing anxieties, worries, fear and depression by spiritual sadhana and meditation.

It is serenity and balance of mind that give real eternal happiness. The wealth of the three worlds is nothing when compared to the bliss enjoyed by that great soul who has serenity and a balanced mind. Bliss cannot be found in a wealthy king with an unbalanced and unbridled mind, living in a palace, but in a poor saint with a magnificent calm and balanced mind and living in a grass hut on the banks of the sacred Ganga.

Why is mental control in daily life emphasized as a part of karma yoga?

Swami Satyananda: The fundamental requisite a person needs is a mind fixed on wisdom and bound with determination. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:56–57) this quality is known as steady wisdom. The definition of that quality is given in the second chapter:

*Duhkhashvanudvignamanaah sukheshu vigatasprihah;
Veetaraagabhayakrodhah sthitadheermuniruchyate.*

*Yah sarvatraanabhisnehastattatpraapya shubhaashubham;
Naabhinandati na dveshti tasya prajnaa pratishthitaa.*

He whose mind is not shaken by adversity, who does not hanker after pleasures, and who is free from attachment, fear and anger, is called a sage of steady wisdom. (56)

He who is everywhere without attachment, on meeting with anything good or bad, who neither rejoices nor hates, his wisdom is fixed. (57)

The definition of steady wisdom is an equally balanced mind. How does a person with a steady mind behave? The *Bhagavad Gita* says that a consistent, enduring, constant and unfluctuating mind is the requisite for walking the spiritual path. Within society there are people who have developed equilibrium, peace and calmness to a great extent, and there are those who have absolutely no mental peace and not even a fraction of equilibrium.

Why talk of the big things in life, when even the little things are upsetting? If a person knows that someone has been talking about him on the street, he won't sleep at night. This is due to the lack of yoga in a person's life. Yoga means mental control. The *Bhagavad Gita* talks about control; it does not talk about renouncing wife, husband, children, property and accomplishments. A person should do his duties, but they should not affect him and bring about a crisis in his life. This is the fundamental teaching of yoga, according to the *Bhagavad Gita*.

In the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali, another important scripture on yoga, it says in the first sutra (1:1):

Athah yoga anushasanam.

Now, therefore, complete instructions regarding yoga.

What is yoga? To have automatic, voluntary, spontaneous control over the mind, its tendencies, fluctuations, and dispassion, is yoga. Again it says (1:2):

Yogashchitta vritti nirodhah.

To block the patterns of consciousness is yoga.

In the majority of people the mind is broken; they do not behave like a powerhouse, but like impotent weaklings. They are so weak-minded that they are not able to bear emotional thoughts or too much love, and their reactions are over-exaggerated. It is sheer madness to attach any importance to the ups and downs of worldly life. The person who gives importance to worldly life sinks.

When the mind is strengthened, one can sit for meditation, *dhyana yoga*. The *Bhagavad Gita* is trying to solve everybody's intimate problems. According to these teachings, one should acquire such strength of mind that while doing actions in the world the mind is not affected by happiness or unhappiness. One should become the witness of both happiness and unhappiness and, being a witness, one keeps watching.

Why is it important to maintain inner balance in karma yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: A central attribute of karma yoga is equanimity. If the mind becomes disturbed, one swings like a pendulum from a positive and optimistic approach during success to a negative and pessimistic approach during failure. This swing of the mind from success to failure and failure to success is disturbing and distracting. According to yoga, this swinging of the mind over which there is no control is dangerous. It may produce a sudden burst of energy and action, but there is also the possibility of withdrawing into one's shell.

In order to maintain mental balance, attachment and the desire for a result and achievement have to be abandoned. Any self-fulfilling expectations, which enrich the ego or create a loss of self-image, have to be abandoned as well.

How can equanimity be attained in the face of conflict and contradictions?

Swami Satyananda: Contradiction is the law of life, progress and mobility. There is contradiction everywhere

in creation; there is no uniform philosophy in life. If there were no contradictions or adverse situations, there would be no progress or evolution. The very fact of existence itself is a contradiction. Therefore, rather than worrying about the various contradictions in life, whether emotional, mental or intellectual, one needs to find a way of accepting contradictions and conflicts and still remain harmonious and balanced. Mental balance should always be attained and maintained. Somehow one must be able to remain above the clamour and not allow anything to be overwhelming. No one should worry! It may not be possible to be one hundred percent true to one's convictions at all times, but still one should try, as nothing should injure the mind.

Mental balance is a sadhana; it is a means of taking care of the mind. Perfection in karma yoga cannot occur until the ceaseless chattering and turmoil of the mind settles. The mind must become as clear as a crystal, as calm as a still pond. When the mind is emptied of conflict, every action and thought attains proper balance and the karma becomes efficient. Thoughts sometimes arise like gigantic eruptions in the endless ocean of the mind and they have great power. Yet, if one does not identify with them, they settle down quietly into the tranquil depths again without leaving the slightest trace. Through karma yoga, the personality becomes gradually more and more pure, until unbroken peace of mind is experienced.

One should try to understand that everything across in life, every person and event, is actually neutral in nature. It is neither the source of pain nor of joy, but due to a defective philosophy one suffers and attributes the suffering to these events, objects and people. In the new philosophy, an absolute distinction has to be made whereby no object, event, person or experience can become a source of positive or negative response, where nothing can disturb one's equipoise. This is the philosophy of samatvam yoga. One should continually analyze oneself to see how the knocks of

life are affecting one's inner state of mind, the divine quality within. An aspirant's life must be so fulfilling and of such nobility that the onslaughts, tremors and shocks from family, friends and enemies do not have any effect. In this way, the mind spontaneously attains tranquillity. The mind must be balanced, but it should be a spontaneous culmination of the process of karma yoga.

How can balance of mind be developed?

Swami Niranjanananda: When creativity and perfection come out in one's karma, it becomes karma yoga. However, one has to be aware and manage the responses and reactions that a karma generates.

If an aspirant does a good action, other people are jealous, try to pull him down and make complaints. If he does a bad action, other people still wish to pull him down and make complaints. That is the law of life. Every time anyone speaks a negative word about someone, it is always a complaint. Therefore, reactions and responses to every action have to be managed.

The best way to manage is not to react to praise or abuse. If somebody is called a dog, that person minds and believes he is a dog. He becomes angry and starts barking, "How can you call me a dog?" If instead of becoming angry, he just says, "Wonderful, only a dog recognizes another dog," the moment has passed in a light manner and the time is gone. Reactions have to be managed in this manner. Instead of becoming the cause of grief, they should become the cause of laughter.

How should a karma yogi face gain and loss?

Swami Satyananda: A karma yogi has the right to perceive both loss and gain and he has the right to identify himself with loss and gain, but he must not be affected or let himself be carried away by anything, for example, a shock or a death.

How can equanimity be developed when emotions are so powerful?

Swami Niranjanananda: Karma yoga is a means of releasing emotional blockages. Emotions are slippery. Intellect is a linear path. Through logic one can go in a continuous line from point A to point B to point C to point D and right to the end. Logic or intellect is a straight, horizontal path, but the emotions are on an incline of at least forty-five degrees, which is difficult to climb up but easy to slide down. It is difficult to develop a positive, happy emotional identity, and it is easy to fall or slide into the negative emotions. No one was ever taught how to hate or be angry, jealous or aggressive. Such emotions come naturally, but one has to learn how to love, be compassionate and positive, as these emotions do not come naturally.

Emotions are a sloping path. One slides down most of the time; climbing up is a big struggle and a long journey. Awareness of how to manage one's emotional expressions is part of karma yoga. If serenity can be maintained in success or failure, one will have a balanced personality. However, one needs to have trust, faith and belief in oneself and, at the same time, have faith and trust in some higher cosmic nature, which guides one's life. The best example of this is a farmer.

A farmer plants seeds and tends the plants in the hope that one day they will yield good results in the form of fruits and grains. The farmer can do only so much; beyond that he has to wait for divine grace and the right climate. There is a limit to human effort. If the environment is not right, the farmer's efforts will be wasted, and if there is too much rain, it can flood the crops. There has to be a proper balance between the trust one places in oneself and the trust one places in the cosmic force. This harmony of trust is known as the karma yoga of the emotions.

How can joy and sorrow be overcome?

Swami Niranjanananda: Joy and sorrow are associated with success and failure. If there is inner balance in success and failure, it is karma yoga. If there is inner balance in the

success and failure of the intellect, it is jnana yoga. If there is inner balance in the emotions that flow towards desires and aspire to flow towards God, that is the beginning of bhakti yoga, and if one applies the principle of balance to the body, one will be able to master hatha yoga.

Balance is a state of mind. Therefore, the first yogic sadhana should be acquiring balance, harmony and equanimity. Asana and pranayama are physical practices. The internal sadhana should be the effort to achieve equanimity. It can be done through japa, mantra, observing the mind, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, kundalini yoga, kriya yoga – there are many practices and methods, but there comes a time when knowledge is achieved and one's karma is attached to yoga.

For karma yoga, the mind, gunas, moods, joys and sorrows have to be understood. Swami Satyananda says that karma yoga is performed to achieve immunity from the reactive conditions of the mind. There must be freedom from the reactions that arise in the mind due to different situations. A negative emotional reaction causes suffering, therefore, one should not become emotional while undergoing suffering. As soon as one becomes emotional the mood changes, clarity is lost and one enters into darkness. If balance can be maintained, the mood will not change, rather one will be able to change the situation. If someone gets slapped, he will be able to prove that the other person was wrong, but if he slaps back he will only end up in a scuffle and the aggressive person will win.

Ultimately, the emotional, mental and sensory responses have to be managed to convert karma into yoga. After acquiring balance one becomes free from the desire to experience pleasure and thereby free from the experience of sorrow.

What was the character of Sri Rama?

Swami Niranjanananda: Sri Rama is known as *maryada purushottam*, which means the best person. It indicates perfect equilibrium. There is no overstepping of the boundaries, or

any encroachment on another's area, instead one remains within appropriate boundaries. This equilibrium is between life, nature and the divine. It indicates a person who is in perfect tune and harmony with the cosmic will and the dharma of human life. There is no conflict or confusion. Rather, he knows the parameters of appropriateness and lives and functions within those parameters for the welfare of all. That was the character of Sri Rama, perfect equilibrium.

What is Sri Krishna's method for maintaining mental balance?

Swami Niranjanananda: Sri Krishna tells Arjuna, "When you are able to perform karma creatively, perfectly, diligently, effectively and without any selfish motive, it will liberate you from the clutches of samskaras and the behaviours of the mind. But if you continue with karma for selfish reasons, without cultivating awareness and understanding, the karma will bind you more to the gross awareness.

"Therefore, continue to do the karmas and identify with sattwic rather than tamasic or rajasic karma. Do not identify with the limiting, conditioned, detrimental effect of the karma, but identify with the sattwic, luminous, creative and perfect aspect of the karma. Whether you succeed or fail is not in your control. You can control how you act, but don't be a soggy face. Act in the best manner possible, using the best situations that are available. Try to maintain mental equipoise while engaged in the world and karmas and maintain this mental equipoise by remembering Me."

What are the results of equanimity?

Swami Satyananda: One who is able to balance the mind in pleasure and pain, gain and loss, praise and criticism will never experience grief and agony. If the mind is always calm and peaceful, one will be able to find a positive way out of any crisis. When this new philosophy enters one's life, externally everything remains the same, but the relationships with each and everything change.

This change is for a great spiritual purpose: to attain peace and equanimity of mind. This peace leads to the highest bliss and liberation from the bondage of worldly existence. One can attain the highest yoga and have the darshan of God if one can make the mind peaceful and still. The art of equanimity is a virtue in itself. Yoga means complete equanimity within oneself and with everybody, with the vast nature and the whole cosmos. Yoga is complete acceptance of anything in life, whether pain or pleasure, defeat or victory, disease or death. Yoga brings about a complete understanding of the whole process of creation.



3

Seva

UNDERSTANDING SEVA

What is the essence of seva?

Swami Sivananda: *Seva* is selfless service to humanity. The sevak becomes an instrument in the hands of the Lord.

What is the object of seva or service?

Swami Sivananda: A person serves the poor and needy, his society, country and suffering humanity at large in order to purify the heart. Through service egoism, hatred, jealousy, the idea of superiority and other negative qualities vanish. Humility, pure love, sympathy, tolerance and mercy are developed. The sense of separateness is annihilated and selfishness is eradicated. With a broad and liberal outlook on life, one begins to feel oneness and unity and realizes: 'One in all and all in One'.

Cleansing of the heart is the main task of the aspirant in the early stages of his spiritual practice. In serving this purpose, seva really excels. It is only in the active field of seva that he has a chance for developing good qualities and removing bad traits. Therefore, seva is usually the first step prescribed by the guru to a spiritual aspirant on the path of yoga. The thick coating of mental impurities is cleared away by doing selfless service for a number of years.

What is the significance of selfless service in this era?

Swami Satyananda: Selfless service will be the social philosophy of the twenty-first century. It will be an age in which each individual will have a thought for others. Each age has a pertinent philosophy, and selfless service is going to be the philosophy of the new millennium.

Are seva and karma yoga the same?

Swami Niranjanananda: Seva and karma yoga are different. Through karma yoga a person learns how to harmonize his day-to-day activities, behaviour and attitudes. He discovers inner peace while performing his duties and activities. Seva is serving others with compassion and with the best one can give. Seva and karma yoga are both taught in the ashram.

Karma means action, and everyone is subject to karma; one cannot live without activity. It is a process that is subtle, physical and continuously happening. Actions are being performed by the senses, mind, emotions and spirit. When yoga is harmonizing and integrating the dimensions of performance and action, it becomes karma yoga.

People perform actions for different reasons, and each action is guided by an attitude. Two people can have different attitudes to the same job. One person may think the job is a burden and the other may see it as a joy. Although both people are performing the same action, the difference in attitude changes the properties and quality of their action.

The person who sees it as joy is in a better position to appreciate the particular karma and to ensure that it is being done wholeheartedly with understanding and feeling. The person who sees the job as a problem is not able to give one hundred percent to that action. Karma yoga is when a person is able to look at all jobs equally with the same feeling, ease and peace of mind. He has attained harmony in action, whether working at a desk or cleaning the toilets. This harmony is between the mind and body; the mind is encouraging the action, and the body and senses are performing the action.

Seva is serving and helping to uplift others without any personal gratification. Seva is not an activity to meet any aim, but a *homa*, an offering, in the *yajna*, the sacrifice of life. Seva contains the best of oneself. When an action is offered to another human being with the best thoughts, feelings, love, affection, sympathy and compassion, it becomes a blessing in disguise to uplift that person.

The experience of karma yoga can be taken to the dimension of seva. Those who can understand this process become further inspired and motivated. Seva becomes a way of life. One lives for others and not for oneself. This is the difference between karma yoga and seva. In order to deepen the experience of karma yoga, one has to add the component of seva yoga. First karma yoga is practised and then one moves into seva. Although one continues to do the same jobs, whether typing letters or working in the kitchen, the attitude and understanding have changed from karma yoga to seva. The beautiful canvas that both karma yoga and seva yoga create in the life of an individual is experienced.

Is service the essence of karma yoga?

Swami Satyananda: In the Upanishads, the concept of karma is twofold: karma done for oneself, and karma done for others. Karma done for the sake of others is known as *brahmakarma*, noble or higher karma. This karma does not bind a person. Karma needs to be done in such a way that it is conducive to one's happiness and benefits the larger community. This is also the upanishadic approach to life. However, the usual approach in the world is to do what is beneficial for oneself and not care about others. A person is never bound by the karmas that are beneficial to society. He remains free, as the karmas do not cause *samskaras* to form bad habits or develop complexes.

The concept of karma yoga is simple: one should work in the same spirit whether for someone else or for oneself. That is one of the most important qualities of a karma yogi. Work

done with selfish motives results in high blood pressure and diabetes; therefore, it is better to work for others. The life of a person who works for others is truly grand.

People may work for an organization, run a business, steal, lie or speak truthfully. Everything they do is either for themselves or their dear ones, but not for the sake of strangers. The human race is inherently selfish, but the rest of creation is selfless: a fruit tree gives fruit, a river gives water, a cow gives milk and her hide is used after she has died. Similarly, people need to benefit others by performing selfless work and share their wealth, knowledge and power. When work is done to help others prosper and profit, it is selfless and pure.

The level of detachment and renunciation may be difficult to understand, but it is the essence of *seva*. *Satkarma* is the teaching and essence of the *Bhagavad Gita*. *Sat* means truth and *karma* means action. *Satkarma* is dharma, doing good acts and earning divine merits. Serving one's husband, wife and children is karma. Feeding the hungry or helping a poor person is *satkarma*, selfless, good and divine. *Satkarma* is any act that helps a person physically, mentally, spiritually, monetarily or in any way that is required.

One's dharma is to serve humanity and to be with those who need love. One should help those who are seeking spiritual life and those who are sick, poor and neglected. Animals should be helped and not killed. There is no karma when work is done for others, but there is karma when work is done for oneself. Of course, one must work a little bit for oneself in order to have food, clothes, comforts and a few facilities. However, one's strength, intelligence, mind, heart, soul, money, knowledge, power, resources and friends should be used for the welfare of others.

Enjoyment and happiness come from giving and sharing with people who are unhappy. This is the central teaching of Jesus Christ, Saint Francis, Gautama Buddha, Mahavira, Mahatma Gandhi, and every intelligent human being.

How can seva be defined in more detail?

Swami Niranjanananda: Seva is twofold, self-oriented and selfless. When actions are performed with personal motivation, for the fulfilment of a personal need, expectation or desire, they are known as self-oriented, self-gratifying or selfish actions. They are meant to satisfy the person who performs them. The term 'selfish action' is not used in a negative sense, but indicates that self-oriented behaviour and desire is predominant in those actions.

The other form of action is selfless, without any personal desire or expectation; there is only performance. The scriptures say that as long as one has social responsibilities, one is selfish. Whatever a person does is for his stability, gratification, fulfilment and enjoyment. However, traits of selflessness are seen from time to time in his life even when he is predominantly selfish. When his actions begin to help others and are not performed for self-gratification or pleasure, they become selfless actions. Performing selfless action is difficult. Only a person whose mind is clear can put a plan into force for performing selfless service. People begin to think that treating the sick and serving the old is selfless service, but that is not the real concept of selflessness.

Selflessness means to come out of one's shell. The mind which identified with oneself has to identify with others. When the world is perceived not as a stranger, but as part and parcel of life's expression, selflessness begins. Selflessness manifests if one feels that each person is part of one's life. After all, when one looks after one's children, knowing and believing that they are part of one's life, some of the actions towards them are selfless and some are self-oriented. In the professional arena, too, streaks of a selfish and a selfless approach are seen.

It is difficult to be totally selfless when living as a householder in society. There has to be a process of learning how to become selfless, and the teacher is the guru. In India, it is said that to learn the real meaning of seva, one has to go to the guru's ashram. In order to perfect seva, one has to

serve the guru, who teaches that whatever one does is not for oneself but an offering to God. An aspirant will practise if there is faith and trust in the guru. Without faith and trust the guru is not guru, only a wise person. With faith and trust, guru and disciple are like two windows in the same room that open to allow the air of selflessness to blow through.

What is the true meaning of seva?

Swami Niranjanananda: In English, the word *seva* is translated to mean service, but in reality, it is the culmination and perfection of karma yoga. When a person is able to perform karma yoga with three ideas: participation, perfection and no expectation, the state of *seva* is experienced. *Ishwara pranidhana*, complete dedication to the Lord, happens automatically. When there is no expectation, one lets go and surrenders. When there is total participation, one-pointedness is experienced. As one strives for perfection, one sees new expressions of creativity. The mind, emotions and actions, head, heart and hands, become aligned and balanced. This balanced expression is known as *seva*.

Swami Sivananda went one step further when defining *seva*. He said the purpose of *seva* is to purify the heart. Purification of the heart comes about when expectations and attachments are refined. When they are no longer sensorial or sensual, they do not carry any idea of gain or loss. Instead, one feels for others as one does for oneself. There is a shift in perception, a shift from being self-orientated to self-expressive.

Seva is a state of participation in life at a higher level of consciousness. *Seva* means the final stage of human involvement in the world, while being in a higher state of consciousness. The literal meaning of the word *seva* is 'to be with that', *saha eva*, to be with that which is human, compassionate and loving. *Seva* means to connect with the divine transcendental nature and express that nature in thought, word and deed. Of course, to do this, one needs to let go of the many identities and ideas that are held

close. This is where the concept of letting go or surrender comes in. Surrendering to the divine will and becoming the instrument of its peace is the outcome of seva. At the final level of seva one becomes only a medium of expressing God's grace and will. That is the real meaning of the word seva, where one is 'with That'.

What is necessary to practise seva?

Swami Satyananda: Seva is an inspired energy and not everybody can practise it. A person who manifests that energy has no knowledge of time and space. With selfishness there can be no seva. If a person works with a selfish motive, he will never be able to have that inspiration. Whatever karma a person does must have a spiritual purpose. A person who serves with even the least expectation is really enacting a part of his ego, and the light is far from him at that time. These issues cannot be decided intellectually; they have to happen spontaneously. Spontaneity of love, selflessness and egolessness are manifestations of higher awareness or the grace of the guru.

How can one begin to transform ordinary self-oriented actions into seva?

Swami Niranjanananda: For an action to be selfless, there must be no desire, attachment or association with what is happening. Otherwise people try to convert water into wine at the first opportunity, not because it helps them in any way, but because it boosts the ego. The selfish nature is usually predominant. To become selfless is one of the hardest things in life. When one can turn a self-oriented karma into a selfless karma, it becomes seva. The clue is simple. While doing something, it should be remembered that one is not the enjoyer. The action may be pleasing, but one is working to achieve a level of excellence and perfection and a qualitative expression in life. That has to be the aim of the action, whether one is a doctor, draftsman, gardener, stonemason, engineer or sannyasin. The thought behind every action must

be that it should help not oneself but many. The action should uplift others, whether they are known or total strangers, and be dedicated to guru and God. Through selfless service one can attain the highest state of godhood.

What is the culmination of karma yoga and seva?

Swami Niranjanananda: Selfless, spontaneous and natural service is the final culmination of karma yoga. God decided to give a boon to a saint who had done a lot of penance in order to attain darshan. However, once he had seen God, the saint desired nothing more in life and refused to accept anything. So God gave the boon of bestowing peace, prosperity and health to the saint's shadow. The saint did not know about the boon, but there was always peace, prosperity and health wherever he went. That absence of personal ambition is notable in a selfless act. The real meaning and outcome of seva is surrendering to the divine will and becoming the instrument of His peace.

How can seva be explained?

Swami Sivananda: Seva is a natural expression of love. It expands the heart and widens the vision. Without waiting to be served, one has to serve with love, kindness and courtesy and look for opportunities to serve. The aspirant should serve without being conspicuous, silently, without any advertisement. He should do what is right and leave the results to look after themselves. Half-hearted service is no service at all. The whole heart, mind and soul have to be given when one serves. Some people have their body in one place, the mind in another and the soul in a third place. That is the reason why they do not make any substantial progress on the path.

Three things are necessary when practising selfless service. One must be free of egoism, not expect any appreciation for the work one does and have a balanced state of mind in success and failure. Life is not fully lived if one does not serve and love humanity. The aspirant should think

how best his energy, intellect, education, wealth and strength can be used for the betterment of others.

How can actions become seva?

Swami Niranjanananda: Using actions and awareness of actions to change one's attitude and understanding, and to sensitize the emotions to connect with others, eventually leads to seva. One has to see everybody with the same eye. Nobody is superior or inferior. Everybody is an emanation of that spirit and, therefore, a complete being at all times. The aspirant can identify with others physically as small or large, socially as friends or family, but in his heart of hearts he sees them as independent units, living their own destiny. He exists to help, support and encourage them to live their destiny with compassion.

How long should one practise seva for?

Swami Sivananda: Seva should be practised until the end of one's life. It is an 'ever-ready polish' to keep the mind clean and pure and the body ever active and healthy. Never say, "I have transcended selfless service. There is no necessity for me to do seva now." Tamas is always ready to invade the body and mind. Seva keeps yogis dynamic and alert. It relaxes the mind for meditation, inspires, provides change and induces vigorous meditation. Work acts as an appetizer for meditation and wisdom. Through the practice of seva alone, one can develop the positive qualities such as tolerance, mercy, kindness, love, patience and self-restraint, which are necessary for the practice of bhakti and jnana yoga. Seva acts as a brush to keep the mind-mirror clean.

HIGHEST YOGA

How does the attitude of seva develop?

Swami Niranjanananda: There are steps and stages that lead to the experience of seva. The medium is action. The whole of creation, life and existence is based on the principle of

action and the response to action, known as karma. No one is free from karma. Just as one breathes in and out, action and the outcome of action is a continuous process leading to evolution. Karma can be directed towards self-fulfilment and be part of the selfish group of actions or part of the selfless group of actions. This is how yogis conceived balance in life. They believed that if one finds balance in actions, ninety percent of life's problems will be solved.

Although the possibility of channelling one's efforts and actions in either direction exists due to the association of the senses and mind with the environment, actions tend to be self-oriented. In fact, if one were to count one's selfless actions, one may find five or ten in a million, not more.

It is these self-oriented actions that give birth to strife, expectation, desire, possessiveness, attachment and jealousy. They develop into mental obsessions and continue growing. An attachment grows into an obsession and into insecurity. There is a point when attachment begins and subsequently goes through changes in a positive as well as a negative direction. The changes come due to the maturing of a thought, association, desire, expectation or identification. They are the results of the unseen strings of karma that bind. It takes a lot of hard work, but it is here that attitudes of karma yoga and seva come into play.

How does working for others affect one's karma?

Swami Satyananda: Working for others influences the karmas and health in a positive way. If there is only selfless affection, instead of selfishness, there will be no emotional disturbance and non-attachment will flourish. One is not caught in the cycle of karma whenever one serves others selflessly without any ulterior motive. Every karma, every action, has an equal and opposite reaction. Only the karma done for others has no reaction, either equal or opposite. Any karma done for oneself and one's family has an equal and opposite reaction. Any karma done for others who are total strangers has no reaction.

It is far easier and more motivating to work for others than for oneself. This is the secret of karma yoga, which few understand and are able to apply. It is the difference between karma and karma yoga. Karma is created when one acts with oneself in mind, with personal desires and problems as a motivation. The mind is freed and the benefits of karma yoga are experienced when actions become service or an offering to others. Karma yoga purifies the heart and makes one pure. Selfless service acts as a detergent and cleans the tainted karma. It washes away the dirt of karma.

In Rishikesh, there were many people suffering from leprosy who begged on the road. Swami Sivananda brought them together and arranged a place for them to live. Many times the local leaders or politicians praised him, saying that he was doing a great social service. Swami Sivananda used to say, "By serving others selflessly, some of the bad karmas are written off, as karma encounters karma and karma contradicts karma. That is how the multiplication of karma takes place."

One should consider this deeply, not just emotionally. If that sublime height can be reached by selfless service, as many great people did, it is worth doing. Saints have advised that selfless service can transform whatever a person has done in life. Selfless service changes the order, motive, reasoning and direction of karma so that it can be managed totally. When the direction of karma is changed, it becomes enjoyable. It purifies the inner self and gives joy.

How does serving others help the individual?

Swami Sivananda: Serving others helps to develop the human personality and is the most effective sadhana for cleansing the mind and purifying the heart. Negative qualities constrict the heart and leave deposits in the mind, which form a veil or thick crust separating an individual from others. Selfless service breaks the crust, removes the veil and expands the heart. The whole world is nothing but a manifestation of God. Service of humanity and country is nothing short of service to God. It is worship and prepares

an aspirant for the attainment of cosmic consciousness, the life of oneness or unity with God.

The individual aspirant does not lose anything in seva. Any service done for the country, society, poor or sick people brings advantages and benefits. Service prepares the mind to receive knowledge of the atman. The *samskaras*, or impressions, of these good actions are indelibly embedded in the subconscious mind. Their force propels one again to do more good actions.

The path of seva, which eventually leads to the attainment of the infinite bliss of the highest self, cannot be futile. In agriculture a person may fertilize and plough the land, but his efforts are futile if there is no rainfall during the year. However, this is not the case in nishkama karma, as there is no uncertainty regarding the result of any effort and there is not the least chance of doing harm. Some harm will certainly result if the doctor is injudicious and administers an overdose of medicine, but this is not the case in the practice of karma yoga. Even if a person does a little nishkama karma in any form, it will save him from the great fear of *samsara*, the cycle of birth and death. That is the reason why Sri Krishna says to Arjuna (2:40):

*Nehaabhikramanaasho'sti pratyavaayo na vidyate;
Svalpamapyasya dharmasya traayate mahato bhayaat.*

In this there is no loss of effort; nor is there any harm. Even a little practice of this service protects one from great fear.

The force of karma yoga induces an individual to work more and more with greater zeal and enthusiasm. The spirit of self-sacrifice grows and selfishness is annihilated. A person who works in the public field for the welfare of the country and humanity realizes the truth of this statement. When the thought of doing good becomes part and parcel of a person's being, he does not entertain any selfish motives and takes immense delight in serving others. There is joy and bliss in the practice of vigorous seva. The karma yogi gains spiritual

strength and power by performing selfless and motiveless actions. When he works without any kind of motive, he feels the effects of purity and inner strength.

The aspirant should become a karma yogi and dedicate his actions to God. He should serve humanity with *atmabhava*, feeling oneness, and Narayana bhava. Selfless service is the highest yoga. Samadhi comes by itself without any effort to the aspirant who is solely absorbed in service.

When an individual consecrates actions to the Lord, he is freed from the bondage of karma and experiences freedom in action. When his actions, results and rewards are dedicated to the Lord, he no longer experiences rebirth. Just as the river abandons its name and form when joining the sea, so the individual soul gives up name, form, desires and egoism when joining the supreme soul. The individual becomes one with the cosmic will. This is the simplest method of yoga. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (12:10):

*Abhyaase'pyasamartho'si matkarmaparamo bhava;
Madarthamapi karmaani kurvansiddhimavaapsyasi.*

If you are unable to practise even this abhyasa yoga, be intent on doing actions for My sake; even by doing actions for My sake, you shall attain perfection.

How does selfless service help to manage the negative expressions of the mind?

Swami Satyananda: Selfless service is the cleanser of the mind. Work done for oneself produces both positive and negative results. Results are not produced when work is done for others, as the emotions are not involved. While doing selfless service, the mind is occupied as monotony and tension are released. A person can never acquire control of the mind until he shares the sorrow and suffering of others and considers their misery to be his own.

It is not easy to conquer the mind, and a person should not fight with it, as ultimately he will be the loser. The only way to deal with the mind is to give it a proper and sound job

that it likes. The mind likes to serve humanity, to help the poor, feed the hungry, nurse the sick, take care of orphans, and go from door to door finding out the problems of others and rendering whatever help is needed there.

The transformation in the mind will be seen, like carbon which becomes a diamond. One may practise raja, jnana and bhakti yoga as much as one likes. However, they only pacify the mind for the time being as a first aid treatment. One can never deal with the mind, whether one is young or old, rich or poor, capable or incapable, unless one can think and aspire passionately to help others. The mind can only be dealt with by a sattwic programming of dedication and self-sacrifice. The vedic, Vaishnava, Christian and Muslim traditions make the same statement.

By fighting with the mind, one creates psychological problems and becomes sick. The only way to conquer the mind is to dedicate it to the service of an ideal that will make it happy. Work done free of charge is necessary for self-transformation, as it cleans the rajo and tamo gunas of the mind. Nishkama karma does not just mean work; there has to be a feeling in one's heart. In India, if a person visits forty odd houses, he will come across scarcity, dearth, suffering, poverty, darkness and dejection. He may come across a house where it is different, but that is an exception. For millions and millions of people the state of affairs is abysmal. They have no shelter, no food, no place to cook, no toilet and no water to drink.

An aspirant is wasting time if he just grapples and wrestles with the mind twenty-four hours a day. He boxes with it, he gives it the slip. In his combat with the mind sometimes he falls and sometimes the mind falls, but neither can attain a decisive victory. The head and the tail win equally, half and half, and the wrestling ends in quits. In the evening he is fagged out. He begins to moan with a headache and takes a tranquillizer or opens a bottle. Some people opt to visit a temple or church for respite. Some go to a discotheque to refresh themselves. Some decide on a session of yoga nidra and play a tape. Nobody thinks

of going to the house of a poor man and lighting a lamp. Nobody thinks of visiting the have-nots.

Seva alone changes the inner programming of the mind. When one removes the pain and helplessness of other people, one's own pain will be removed.

How can one overcome one's limitations and become selfless?

Swami Satyananda: Most people do practise putting others' needs first, although in a limited sense. Parents put the needs of their children ahead of their own. When a person loves somebody, whether parents, friend, husband or wife, he always places their needs ahead of his own. He does this because he considers that person as his daughter, son or darling. This sense of possession has to go away, and that is the difficult part. If one is able to extend oneself towards a monkey, an animal or a stranger, it means that one has become selfless.

Once during the Kumbha Mela, a man suffering with leprosy was brought to the ashram in a sack. Swami Sivananda told me to put him in a room and clean his body with the necessary antiseptics. He was a doctor and knew what to do. I carried out the duty I had been given. That man was obnoxious. I could not accept his smell, attitude, behaviour and entire being. The next morning, Swami Sivananda asked about the man. I said, "Swamiji, that man is so difficult; his disease and sores are so difficult."

Swami Sivananda replied, "You want to find God without any effort. You want to realize God without a change of heart, mind, philosophy and concept, without destroying your personal nest. First destroy your personality, character, views, habits, likes and dislikes and change your heart." If it had been a beautiful young lady, I would have served her without complaining. If it had been a young or rich man, I would have served him. I was not fit to realize God. Before self-surrender can take place, the entire personality has to be rearranged.

How does seva manage the ego?

Swami Niranjanananda: Swami Satyananda tells of an incident with his guru in Rishikesh. Swami Sivananda had given instructions that ashram residents had to serve the sick people in the ashram. They were treated in the ashram and upon recovery, Swami Sivananda would send them off with clothes, grains and money.

Once Swami Satyananda and Swami Chidananda brought a leper to the ashram. Swami Sivananda saw the sick man and instructed the two disciples to ‘serve the Narayana’ – Swami Sivananda always referred to people as Narayana. This man was in bad shape and had innumerable sores, oozing with pus. Every day Swami Satyananda and Swami Chidananda would clean his sores and look after his needs. One day, as Swami Satyananda was dressing his wounds, he happened to press a bit too hard. The man screamed and slapped his face. Swami Satyananda was young and hot-blooded and became furious. He went to Swami Sivananda and said, “Get someone else to serve your Narayana! He slapped me. I am not going back to him.” Swami Sivananda smiled and said, “This is Narayana testing your commitment to seva,” and sent Swami Satyananda back to the man.

Any work one does can bring forth a reaction, whether it be selfish or selfless. Due to an expectation from one’s actions, and therefore there is always a reaction. If the guru is standing in front of the disciple asking him to do something while another person continues to abuse him, for how long will he be able to endure the abuse? These reactions are due to ego and are managed with seva. Ego management is only possible through seva, not self-oriented action. Self-oriented action enhances the ego while seva reduces the ego.

How can the various types of desire be overcome?

Swami Satyananda: Why waste time fighting with *lokeshana*, *dareshana* and *vitteshana*, the desires for recognition, sensual enjoyment and security? I did not desire a child, but ended up making disciples. I did not desire wealth, but wealth

came. The best philosophy is to spend a large portion of one's wealth on the needy, helpless, handicapped and orphaned. A blind or lame person has desires; a leper has desires. People only worry about their own desires but not those of others. When they begin to worry about others, the pressure of their own desires will diminish.

A man is lying by the side of the road. He is old and begs from the passers-by. There is a small aluminium bowl beside him with flies flitting about. The man is thin, frail and weak, but still he has desires. Although he is incapable of fulfilling his sensual desires, he wants to fulfil them. A man who cannot digest still dreams of enjoying good food. The weakest, most sick and suffering person still thinks of sensory enjoyment.

I was a beggar for four to five years. When I sat on the *ghat*, the river bank, in Varanasi to beg for the first time, the beggar next to me said, "Move away from here. You are not from our community of beggars. Go and find another place." They knew I was a sannyasin living as a beggar for the experience, but they were not there for the experience. I saw people without an arm or a leg, lame, sick and penniless, dreaming of becoming the prime minister! As I heard these helpless, weak, sick people talk, I realized they had so many desires.

This is an example that *trishna*, craving, exists in each and every being. The only difference is that humans know and other creatures do not. If one wants liberation, one should educate a poor child or help the lame to walk. One should spend one or two thousand rupees on a blind man, so that he can have an eye operation to regain his sight. One should find a home for a leper. Helping and serving others is the easiest way to free oneself from bondage.

What is the importance of seva in spiritual evolution?

Swami Satyananda: Living for others is the easiest way to evolve spiritually. I am saying this from my own experience, because I have done everything. There is practically no form of spiritual life which I have not experienced, but my mind opened when I started living for others. As long as I was

living for myself, I was blind. When I began to think about others, about those who are sick, poor and have no home, I started growing inwardly. Now I am close to my destiny, almost there.

SIVANANDA YOGA

Sit less, serve more.
Hate less, love more.
Take less, give more.
Worry less, laugh more.
Rest less, work more.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

What are the steps on the spiritual path?

Swami Sivananda: The salt of life is selfless service, the bread of life is universal love, the water of life is purity. Hence, serve, love and be pure. The fragrance of life is generosity, the sweetness of life is devotion, the pivot of life is meditation. The goal of life is self-realization. Therefore, be generous, be good and do good, meditate and realize the Self.

Serve: The first step on the spiritual path is selfless service of humanity. Selfless service is the watchword along the road to salvation. Service always elevates and makes one divine. Service purifies, redeems and energizes. To live life through service is to be intimate with life's innermost secret. To serve humanity with sincerity and feeling is to be in union with the cosmic consciousness.

Love: Love is truth and love is good. It is the highest expression of the soul. It is the hope of the world. Wherever there is love, there is peace, and wherever there is peace, there is joy. One should spread the gospel of cosmic love throughout the world. Let the message of love reach the hearts of all and awaken brotherhood in the bosom of humanity. The world has to be encircled with a heart of love.

Give: One must help the poor, sick, forlorn, orphans and widows. If a person gives, the wealth of the world is his. It is the secret of abundance and divine life. Therefore, give, give, give. A person makes a living by what he gets, but he makes a life by what he gives. If one gives in plenty, one will enjoy peace and prosperity, attain purity of heart and experience an indescribable thrill of divine ecstasy and spiritual bliss. This gives tremendous inner strength. An aspirant must radiate thoughts of goodwill and share what he has with others. He should use his material wealth, knowledge, and spiritual wisdom as a divine trust for the benefit of God's children. Prayer takes the aspirant halfway to God, fasting to the door of His supreme abode, and charity procures him admission.

Purify: Mental purity bestows calmness, cheerfulness, one-pointedness, victory over the senses and fitness to attain God-realization. The mind must be purified by the practice of virtues, self-control and devotion to God. A purified mind becomes a friend for it wears out the shell that covers the truth. There is no greater undertaking for any aspirant than purifying his life of enmity, hatred and passion and filling it with love, goodness and peace.

Be good: Goodness is the highest virtue. It implies kindness, benevolence and morality. Positive habits have to be cultivated and good, sublime divine thoughts entertained. To be good is divine. If an aspirant wants to be good, he must see what is good, hear what is good, think what is good, do what is good, speak what is good, read what is good, write what is good, eat what is good and drink what is good. Ultimately, he will be good.

Do good: A good deed is never lost. It purifies the heart and leads to the descent of divine light and the dawn of divine grace. Every good deed is a seed of immortality. People should do all the good they can, in all the ways they can, to all the people they can, in every place they can, at all times they can, with all the zeal, strength and love they can, and as long as ever they can. Their nature must be to do good.

Meditate: Meditation destroys the causes of sorrow and pain. Regular meditation makes the mind calm and steady, and opens the avenues of intuitional knowledge. When the practitioner enters the silence through deep meditation, the outside world and his troubles drop away, and he enjoys supreme peace. In this silence lies the light of lights, real strength and joy. He has to shut the doors of the senses and still his thoughts and emotions. When he sits motionless in the early morning hours, has a receptive attitude and communes with the Lord, he will enjoy the abiding peace of silence.

Realize: Everyone should live to realize the higher self within. No vision of truth or God is possible without annihilating the ego. The goal of life is God-realization.

What are the different stages of reaching seva?

Swami Niranjanananda: When one turns a self-oriented karma into a selfless karma, it becomes seva. If the harmonium had a mind of its own, it may think, “Oh, I play really well.” But the harmonium cannot play itself. If an adept player plays it, the melody will be harmonious. If a first-timer tries to play, the melody will be disharmonious. Therefore, it is the player who is important.

When the aspirant understands that he is only a medium to fulfil a destiny, but something else is playing him, the first level of surrender comes. He says to himself, “I am not the doer. I am not the performer; I am only a box like a harmonium. Somebody is playing me, sometimes in accord, sometimes not, and with each melody, one part of my destiny is being fulfilled.” The final commandment of yoga is ishvara pranidhana. It is the first stage in transforming self-oriented karma into selfless karma and leads to purification of the emotions.

Swami Sivananda, in his practical eightfold path of yoga, has placed service on the first rung. Service or connecting with those in need helps to purify oneself. He says, “Do not fight attachments as they are a part of every individual.”

He gives the example of drops of black ink put in a cup of water. Does the water turn black or does the ink turn watery? If one wants to clear the water of the dark ink of selfish attachments, more water or selfless attachment has to be added. When the selfishness of attachment is diluted and the attachment is directed not to one but to ten, not to ten but to a hundred, not to a hundred but to a thousand, the selfishness of one's attachment is divided by a thousand. The selfishness of attachments is reduced by including more people in the fold of one's life.

When more people are included, one experiences the eternal human connection that transcends intellect and feelings. It shows that one is a part of that unified field known as G-O-D, the source of Generation, Organization and Destruction. It is consciousness which creates, sustains and destroys. It is also the concept of ishwara pranidhana, leading to purification of the heart, due to expansion of one's perception and awareness.

What part does seva play in the scheme of life and evolution?

Swami Sivananda: Life is meant for serving others. God's plan for human evolution is seva to humanity. To grow on the spiritual path, one must serve humanity selflessly, become a lover of humanity and feel that the world is one big family and all people are its members. Humanity is God, and service of humanity is worship. One who works for all is dear to God. The cancer of individuality is dissolved when one serves humanity with divine bhava.

Seva is the first step on the spiritual path. Meditation and samadhi are not possible without preliminary training in seva. The meaning of true life is service and sacrifice. The more energy one spends in serving and elevating others, the more divine energy flows. One who lives a life of seva understands that the secret of God-realization is serving humanity. The world is burning with misery and suffering, therefore, everyone should wake up and serve!

According to Swami Sivananda, what is the role of seva in spiritual evolution?

Swami Satyananda: Swami Sivananda always emphasized service as the stepping stone to spiritual life. He used to say, “Serve, love, give.” The primary level of spiritual schooling is serve, love and give. He explained that just as there is an education system in the world from kindergarten to university, similarly there is an education system in spiritual life. God exists, and one needs to think about Him. One has to meditate, pray and purify the heart. The kindergarten of spiritual life is service. Through service one will learn to love others. The next class is ‘give, give and give’.

After this, the aspirant should purify the mind, heart, intentions and actions by the practice of *yama* and *niyama*, the yogic code of discipline. He should practise *ahimsa*, non-violence, *satya*, truthfulness, *asteya*, honesty, *brahmacharya*, sensual restraint, *aparigraha*, non-possessiveness, *shaucha*, cleanliness, *santosha*, contentment, *swadhyaya*, self-study, *tapas*, austerity, and *Ishwara pranidhana*, surrender.

Just as dirty clothes are soaked in detergent, one needs to put one’s heart in detergent, soak it and clean it. Swami Sivananda said, “Pain and suffering are the crucible into which nature throws a man whenever she wants to make him a sublime superman.” Pain and suffering have to be accepted. There should be no fear of pain or dependence on the comforts of worldly life. Riches do not accompany anyone at the end of his life! Jesus said (Luke, 18:22–25):

For it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

This does not mean that one should not become rich, but one should not depend on wealth as security in life.

After purification, Swami Sivananda spoke of meditation and prayer. Meditation and prayer are the higher form of college education. In meditation and prayer a person enters a state of *shanti*, tranquillity, and becomes one with God. There is only God, whether in the form of Rama,

Christ, guru or Govinda. Finally, at the highest level comes realization.

Serve, love and give are elementary education. Purification is intermediate education, meditation is college education and realization is postgraduate education. This is the curriculum of spiritual schooling.

Why is selfless service necessary to remove selfishness?

Swami Sivananda: Selfishness, born of ignorance, is a great impediment to yoga and life. It clouds understanding and is the root cause of human suffering. Sage Vasishtha says in *Yoga Vasishtha* (4:15:46):

*Aadhivyaadhimahaavartagartasamsaaravartmani;
Mamatograandhakoope'sminmaa pataataapadaayini.*

Take care of the inward sorrows, diseases and dangerous whirlpool in the course of your life, and do not fall into the black hole of selfishness, which gives the soul its greatest anguish.

A selfish person is far from God as the core of his heart is consumed by worry, greed, jealousy and depression. He may practise asana, kumbhaka and a little japa, yet he has an unsympathetic and hard heart. Therefore, he cheats himself of the experience of samadhi and God's darshan. A person lives in vain if he does not have a generous heart.

Through selfishness, a person creates a boundary wall around himself and his family members. Most people are unable to feel the suffering of a stranger. They may present an expensive car to their own child, but will not spend one rupee to relieve the suffering of the poor. When selfishness is removed, half of one's spiritual sadhana is over.

One should serve, love and unite one's heart with all, be a little more patient, forgiving, charitable and loving. The angle of vision and views must be changed. The experience of selflessness is not merely self-denial or service done without reward, but is achieved through beholding the One

Self in each and every being, including the wicked and ungrateful.

The precious gems of purity, patience and humility can be acquired through selfless activities and loving service. Selflessness is a divine virtue, the mother of cosmic love, a friend of spiritual progress, a herald of saintliness, an archenemy of egoism and the jewel of an aspirant. It is the alpha and omega of spiritual sadhana and the yoga of all religions.

The perfection of human nature is to restrain the selfish nature. A perfectly selfless person is called a sage, who cannot live in that state for more than two or three weeks without dissolving into the Absolute. If selflessness became the religion of the world, everyone would experience heaven on earth. Therefore, people should work unselfishly in perfect harmony and healthy cooperation for their own upliftment and for the wellbeing of the world.

What is the role of seva?

Swami Sivananda: An aspirant develops positive qualities and learns to be indifferent to praise, abuse or censure only through service. When he is in contact with people, he develops forbearance and adaptability. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna emphasizes that perfection is attained not by ceasing to engage in action, but by doing actions as divine offering, with a spirit of non-attachment and sacrifice. Taking the world as a mere appearance, the aspirant has to work in the world with untiring patience and atmabhava, feeling unity with all. The aspirant must have a clear understanding of the basis of the world. Sri Krishna says (3:9):

*Yajnaarthaatkarmano'nyatra loko'yam karmabandhanah;
Tadartham karma kaunteya muktasangah samaachara.*

The world is bound by actions other than those performed for the sake of sacrifice. Therefore, O son of Kunti, perform action for that sake, for sacrifice alone, free from attachment!

The spiritual aspirant has to evolve through serving humanity, living in the world and learning from the world without becoming one with the world. In *Yoga Vasishtha*, Sage Vasishtha said to Sri Rama (2:13:48):

*Vyavahaaraparenaapi kaaryavindamavindataa;
Bhaanunevaambarasthena nojjhyate na cha vaanchhayate.*

Those who are engaged in the world but do not mix in it, like the all-illuminating sun, are known as the best of men.

People should feel that they are *nitya*, eternal, *shuddha*, pure, *buddha*, wise, *mukta*, free, and *atman*, the self. They should claim this hereditary property and birthright amidst typewriting, arranging chapters of a book and other multifarious works. This is better than life in a cave, as it is the dynamic, integral yoga of Lord Shiva, Adi Shankaracharya and Lord Buddha. Adi Shankaracharya, the propounder of Mayavada, was active throughout his life. He preached only against selfish karmas, not against selfless actions. He was a wonderful karma yogi.

The teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* is self-realization in and through the world, through service to humanity. The same is preached by Sage Vasishtha to Sri Rama: Thinking of God while living in the world amidst various activities is far superior to life in a cave.

How can one put another's need before one's own?

Swami Satyananda: Swami Sivananda had a simple process before eating. When the food came to him, he first took a little piece of rice, which he did not eat himself, roti, dal and vegetables, and put it on the ground as an offering to the gods and divine beings. Some people before eating take some food to the cowshed, as for them feeding the cow is the highest *dharma*, or duty. Swami Sivananda used to do his offering first and keep some food for a swami in the ashram. This is just a simple example.

Every day people gave so much to Swami Sivananda: blankets and clothes, sweets and fruits, biscuits and money. He just kept feeding and giving to everyone, from human beings to monkeys. In Rishikesh, there used to be a lot of monkeys who were shrewd rowdies, not gentlemen. The ashram had a big kitchen with a hall and the residents used to close the door to eat inside. The moment they opened the door, the monkeys would come into the kitchen with great speed and take up to twenty rotis. When the swamis carried food from the kitchen to the rooms of the sick, the monkeys would attack and take away the rotis, vegetables and other food. Swami Sivananda said that the monkeys represented the great Hanuman, the monkey god, and it was the duty of the swamis to feed them every Friday morning. On Thursday, a large amount of horse gram was soaked in water and the next morning it would be taken out onto the terrace for the monkeys.

Such great figures as Swami Sivananda come ready-made with that nature, but in the case of most people, good deeds can be an egoistic action. A person is propelled by his ego, so he does good deeds in order to feed that ego and self-satisfaction. However, there are people who always consider it their duty to do good to others, and who were born only with that purpose. There are many stories in both the East and West about people who consider the needs of others to be more important than their own.

Swami Sivananda did act without any thought of self. It is difficult for people who are practical and pragmatic to understand what he was doing. He only thought that God was in every form. The monkey is God, the boys and girls are God, the ashramites are God, the guests are God. Therefore, if anybody was sick or in trouble, he helped them not for any gain but as worship of God. That is the attitude of saintly people.

Saintly people have the attitude of divinity and people who are charitable, humanistic and philanthropic have the attitude of doing good to others. Sage Vasishtha says in *Yoga Vasishtha* (6:2:47:30):

*Sajjano hi samuttaarya vipadbhyo nikatasthitam;
Niyojayati sampatsu svaalokeshviva bhaaskarah.*

It is the nature of virtuous men to deliver their neighbours from danger and calamity, and to lead them towards wellbeing and prosperity, as the sun leads people to light.

Why is seva the highest sadhana?

Swami Sivananda: There are many forms of sadhana, such as stopping the breath for two hours by means of kumbhaka, turning the beads for twenty-four hours, sitting in samadhi for forty days without food in an underground cellar, cutting the fraenum of the tongue and practising khechari mudra, standing on one leg in the scorching summer sun, doing trataka on the midday sun, chanting *Om* in silent and sequestered jungles, and shedding an ocean of tears while doing sankirtan. These sadhanas are of no avail, however, unless an aspirant combines a burning love for God and a fiery spirit to serve Him in all beings. It is said in the Bible that the two greatest commandments are (Matthew 22:37–40):

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. (37)

This is the great and first commandment. (38)

And the second is like this: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. (39)

On these two commandments depend all the laws and the prophets. (40)

Aspirants are sadly lacking in these two indispensable qualifications, and therefore they do not make headway when they meditate in solitude. They need to initially prepare the ground, the *antahkarana*, by the protracted practice of love and service. Some bhaktas wear rosaries around their necks and wrists and continually mutter *Hare Rama Hare Krishna*. However, these bhaktas never approach a sick or dying

person to give him some water or milk. They do not ask, “What do you want, brother, how can I serve you?” Instead they look at him from a distance.

These bhaktas do not have the heart to serve another human being whose life is trembling in the balance, or to speak a few kind and encouraging words to him. Yet they expect to have darshan of that merciful Lord even though their hearts are made of flint. They hope for God-realization when they do not have the eyes to see God in all beings or the spirit to serve Him in all of His forms.

Feeling more and more for others is a sign of expansion of heart and spiritual growth. Real spiritual progress starts in selfless service. If an aspirant sees an animal or human being lying on the road severely injured, will he be able to tear a piece of cloth from his shirt and bandage him? This is the test to gauge the heart. Not many have done this kind of service, devoting their entire life to the service of others. Whether they obtain salvation or not is of no concern to them. Their duty is to serve the Lord in all, to untiringly serve the poor and sick, and to saturate their entire being in the service of others.

How can the yoga of Sage Patanjali and of Swami Sivananda be compared?

Swami Niranjanananda: Sage Patanjali teaches the yoga of personal transformation, which is the first stage. Swami Sivananda teaches the yoga of reconnecting with the world after having transformed oneself. That is the last stage. After the samadhi of Sage Patanjali, one starts with service, becoming active again in the world, but this time as an enlightened being, not as an ignorant fool who only cares for himself. For an enlightened being everyone's needs become his own needs.

Just as Sage Patanjali speaks of ‘yama’, Swami Sivananda speaks of ‘seva’. Sage Patanjali speaks of ‘niyama’; Swami Sivananda speaks of ‘love’. Through service, one embraces the whole world into the love and sentiment of oneness.

There is no isolation from anybody, but connection with everybody, bringing light into the life of everyone. Sage Patanjali speaks of 'asana'; Swami Sivananda says 'give'. Sage Patanjali speaks of 'pranayama'; Swami Sivananda says 'purify'. Through giving, one is able to remove every remnant of the dross from life and purify oneself. Sage Patanjali speaks of 'pratyahara'; Swami Sivananda says 'do good'. The responses are now conscious and appropriate; the understanding is based on dharma and *nyaya*, the spiritually correct way. Therefore, one does good, whereas previously one did not have that understanding. When one does good, one is good. The goodness flowering within illuminates one from inside. When Sage Patanjali speaks of 'dhyana', Swami Sivananda says 'meditate'. Meditation comes forth once again; however, this time it is not for a selfish purpose, but with the realization that God pervades the entire nature. Finally, Sage Patanjali speaks of 'samadhi' and Swami Sivananda says 'realize'. Here they speak of the same.

Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga represents the personal aspect of self-transformation, and Swami Sivananda's yoga represents the expression of that yogic attainment in practical life.

What are your aims in life?

Swami Sivananda: The highest goal is the glory of service at the feet of the Lord. I never longed for liberation nor aspired for God-realization. I shall continue serving everyone and purifying my heart through selfless service. I shall always try to see God in everyone; otherwise I shall take birth again and again and go on serving until God Himself voluntarily offers me liberation.

My nature is to work and my goal is to serve. The spirit of service has been in me since childhood. Even if this organization and ashram collapse, I will sit in a hut, serve a few patients, print some leaflets and serve humanity. My aims and ideals are to raise the fallen, lead the blind, share what I have with others, bring solace to the afflicted, cheer up the suffering,

love my neighbour as my own self, and protect animals, women and children. I help, guide and live to serve all. I live to make everyone happy. This body is meant for service.

What is the outcome of living Sivananda yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Living the principles of Sivananda yoga brings people together; it binds them and develops a force of conviction, faith and a belief, not in God alone, but in the quality of humanity. This belief in the quality of humanity is higher and more satisfying than a belief in God. God is always there as the last resource. Whenever one wants to see God, one only has to open the door of the heart. Therefore, it is not too difficult, but to see the qualitative goodness in humanity is very difficult. By living these principles it was found through the ages that a qualitative life can be lived, which Swami Sivananda called the 'divine life'.

ATMABHAVA

Why should one think of others first?

Swami Satyananda: A person's primary obligation is to others; his secondary obligation is to himself. Everyone has an obligation towards the person who is a stranger, who is unrelated, unknown and unfamiliar. The first debt is to him. The responsibility or debt towards one's family comes afterwards and is already being repaid. The father is repaying the debt to his son from the previous birth. He is repaying the debt to his daughter by giving fifty or sixty thousand rupees as her marriage gift. The total responsibility for the person who was an enemy in a previous life is still borne, but there is no concern for anyone who is unrelated.

Anyone can give a sari, a pair of shoes, a rupee, a utensil, a serving spoon, an umbrella, a torch or a television set to a poor man. Most people follow a crooked path, but the highway and straight path to reach God is never to think of oneself.

Does a realized person continue to serve others and in what way?

Swami Sivananda: A spiritual seeker who is established in cosmic life does not shun society. He loves all as he loves the self which pervades all creatures. Selfless service springs from him as the breath springs from all living beings. When he finds that someone is suffering, he rushes to bring relief. This is not due to love for that particular person, but due to his realization that his own self pervades that person. Therefore, the goodwill that fills his heart naturally flows towards a suffering person and he endeavours to remove his affliction. He renders this service naturally for the sake of service. It is love for love's sake. It is a love that does not clamour for reciprocity, a service that does not look back for appreciation or reward. In this love and service all are equal.

What is Advaita Vedanta?

Swami Niranjanananda: Advaita Vedanta is an ancient and powerful school of thought in India. Philosophy means love for knowledge, but a *darshana* means something that one can feel, realize, experience and know. Advaita Vedanta is a darshana and implies not only a way of thinking, but also a lifestyle. Both go hand in hand. The purpose of Advaita Vedanta is to see the presence of the supreme being in everything and everywhere, in the omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent nature.

It gives the experience and realization of the divine nature inherent in and pervading every aspect of life and creation. Advaita Vedanta is seeing oneness in everything, not duality. *Advaita* means singular; without duality, without a double, and *vedanta* is the end of perceivable, understandable knowledge. The culmination of higher realization is attained by the individual with atmabhava. Only with atmabhava can Advaita Vedanta darshana be lived and experienced.

The foundations of the spiritual concepts in Advaita Vedanta come from a simple story in the Upanishads. Three representatives, one of gods, one of demons and one of

humans, decided to visit their Maker in heaven to ask Him what their aim in life was. While they were on the way to meet their Maker, they heard a lot of thunder in the clouds and each representative got a specific message from the sound of the thunder. The representative of the gods came back to his community and said the message from the Maker was to develop restraint, *sanyam*. The message to the demons was to develop *daya*, compassion. The message to humans was to become selfless and learn to give, *daan*. Restraint of the mind and senses, sensitivity and purity of sentiments and heart, and selflessness combined with the ability to give and share were the three stepping stones to *atmabhava*. However, these three ideas were incomplete without the concept of surrender, *samarpan*.

Devotion and surrendering to the higher will became the means to achieve the aim of *atmabhava*. This was not only a philosophy but also a lifestyle. Time and again, people were taught this philosophy and lifestyle by different masters and gurus who have come in the history of humanity. They taught lessons on these five subjects: *sanyam*, *daya*, *daan* and *samarpan*, leading to *atmabhava*, seeing the divine presence in everything. This is known as the eternal tradition of human beings, the *Sanatana dharma*.

The masters highlighted and emphasized one particular aspect, according to the need and time. Buddha and Mahavira highlighted restraint, *sanyam*, and yoga came as a means to attain it. Similarly, the guru's teaching led to *daya*, acquiring a compassionate, sensitive, understanding, pure and unconditioned heart. When the selfless act begins, one moves out of the selfish dimension into the selfless dimension and one gives *daan*. Then comes *samarpan*, one surrenders to the divine will, and comes to the point of realization.

Swami Sivananda gave the understanding that by cultivating positive virtues and strengths in life everyone can experience and live the higher, divine life. Everyone can live in a manner which is divine, transformative, qualitative,

virtuous, good, positive and optimistic. The same teaching was carried forward by Swami Satyananda when he showed that it is possible to live a life in harmony with the divine will.

How does working in the world lead to God-realization?

Swami Satyananda: A person may say that working in the world is worldly, but I feel that it is spiritual, as humankind is one of God's manifest forms. In order to realize God, one needs to surrender and devote oneself completely. God is seen through surrender, devotion and service to others. God is everywhere and in everything, including oneself. God means 'universal consciousness'. God is defined as *nirakara*, formless, and *nirguna*, without qualities. He has no name, caste or home. However, this is not the complete definition of God, as God is also *sakara*, with form.

God has two aspects, transcendental and immanent. He is beyond time, space and matter, but he is also present in all beings. Both concepts of God have to be accepted, not just the transcendental. The immanent form is everywhere and in everything. A person is serving God when he cares for a tree, protects the land, purifies a river, balances the atmosphere and helps the needy. God exists in many forms, from the microbe to the towering tree, from the limited mind to the universal mind, in the person who needs help and in the animal that needs protection. The whole world is God's manifest form. This manifest universe, this manifest world, you, me and others, are all forms of God.

One is therefore doing something for God when serving, helping, feeding, assisting, supporting, sympathizing and expressing compassion for others. This is spiritual service, not social service. God is in all the faces of those who are suffering, hungry, sick and ignored by destiny and fortune. It is said in the Bible (Matthew 25:35–36, 40):

I was hungry and you gave me to eat;
I was thirsty and you gave me to drink;
I was a stranger and you took me into your home; (35)

I was naked and you clothed me;
I was sick and you came to help me;
I was in prison and you came to visit me. (36)

Whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine,
you did for me. (40)

The realization of God must become a total experience, not partial. Those who are dedicated to spiritual life, who think God is their life, must serve the many forms of God.

Those who are suffering, unhappy, naked and floundering in darkness are the different forms of God. One cannot ignore the form of God that is immanent and all-pervading, and go running after the transcendental God only. Helping others is praying to God and living amongst the poor is living with God. One's family and children, brothers and sisters, are spread all over the world. One should try to enlarge the scope of one's family and leave the little cage of husband, wife and children. Instead of saying 'we two and our two', why not say 'husband, wife, children and other children'? This is *atmabhava*, feeling oneself in others, and by developing this feeling, the possibility of enlightenment is greater.

How can one help other people?

Swami Niranjanananda: A person who is able to experience *atmabhava* and see himself in other people begins to understand them and their situation. Having come to this point, he should help if he is capable, or direct them to somebody else who can. There must be cooperation between human beings to help people come out of their misery. There is a famous saying: "If a person is hungry, don't give him fish to eat, but teach him how to fish." This was the principle of Swami Sivananda, who did not believe in charity. He said that charity is the mother of poverty, dependence and weakness. He always emphasized the role of *purushartha*, self-effort and self-empowerment.

Lending a helping hand empowers another person to manage his life and to be responsible for his own peace and

prosperity. This is the real meaning of lending a helping hand, and this is the idea of seva. According to Swami Satyananda, when a person goes to the market to buy shoes or clothes for his two children, instead of buying two pairs, he should buy three, two for his children and one for the unknown child that he has adopted in his mind. There are enough deprived people in the world to whom that pair of shoes can be given, and they will cherish it for the rest of their lives. They will always remember the kindness showered upon them.

If every affluent citizen looks after the needs of one deprived citizen, in ten years there will be no poverty anywhere. A person is fortunate to have enough to eat and waste, but eighty percent of the population in India do not have one square meal a day. They are one's fellow beings who need some encouragement, who need to know that they have not missed out on the opportunities in life, and that somebody is looking after them. If this becomes a person's one activity in life, he will die happy, knowing that he has brought smiles to one person or one family. When a person has this realization, it will be a day of great satisfaction.

Should help be given only to one's neighbours?

Swami Satyananda: Who is my neighbour? Amarwa, the next village, is my next door neighbour and Rikhia is my close neighbour. Neighbour means whoever is nearby. Nowadays, when one can reach London in four hours by aeroplane, what is the definition of a neighbour? In ancient times, the word neighbour meant the house next door. These days the barriers of time and space are removed and the whole world is next door, the whole world is a neighbourhood and all people are one's kith and kin. Many of these relations need help, so one's boundaries must not be narrow and small. "This is mine and this is yours" are the thoughts of narrow-minded people. For a person with a big heart, the whole of creation is kith and kin.

How should one look at those in need?

Swami Niranjanananda: Humanity is one single club; there is no elite and no deprived group. The groups may exist socially and economically, but as part of the life experience that all are undergoing, there is no separation. Some people have had the opportunity to express themselves and others have not. When their time comes, they too will shine. After all, it is the same brain, the same mind, the same force in each and everyone; the application depends on the opportunities that one is given in life. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (18:61) Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that to be a real human being, he should see everybody with the same eyes:

*Eeshvarah sarvabhootaanaam hriddeshe'rjuna tishthati;
Bhraamayansarvabhootaani yantraaroodhaani maayayaa.*

The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, causing all beings, by His illusive power, to revolve as if mounted on a machine.

How did Swami Sivananda's life and character demonstrate the essence of seva?

Swami Satyananda: Swami Sivananda's fundamental philosophy of life was seva. He placed the singing of God's name at the top of his priority list and meditation at the end of his list, a long way off. Whereas most practitioners start their spiritual life with meditation, Swami Sivananda's spiritual life started with service and culminated in meditation. The beginning of spiritual life stems from service to humanity. Swami Sivananda's life was an example of compassion, charity and generosity. He was simple, devout, kind and compassionate. He was happiest when he was feeding and giving to people. His philosophy in life was that God is real and everything else is unreal. He was a generous and large-hearted man.

Swami Sivananda's heart was completely open, without any doors or windows. He was not at all interested in accumulating wealth. He used to say, "Spend more than you have. Feed the poor and give them medicine. Give blankets

to the pilgrims. Make arrangements for drinking water during the summer, and extend all possible help to the sadhus and sannyasins.” He always thought about others. Whenever he met people he did not give spiritual lessons, but said pleasant things to them and gave clothes, food and medicine. He could remember the names of each one of his acquaintances from thirty-five to forty years back. If a man had become old, he would ask, “How is your grandson? He was in the eighth class. Where is he now? What is he doing? He had a mole here. Is the mole still there?” He cared for people, so he knew everything about them, especially their difficulties, problems, ambitions and desires.

What is the best attitude to have towards those one seeks to help?

Swami Sivananda: The right spirit is necessary in seva. Not the smallest insect is to be treated callously. A person should work for the benefit of others because they are divinities, not for personal glory. Even a tiny bit of seva in this spirit is recognized at once, while thousands of pounds given with a view to self-advertisement may earn little merit. If a person sees a poor man clad in rags standing in front of his door, he should feel that the Lord is before him in the form of a poor man and serve him with Narayana bhava. A person should serve and worship the same God manifest in the poor, the sick and the suffering, as he worships in the temple of his own heart.

Serving humanity must not be a mere mechanical act; it must be done with atmabhava, intense feeling for others. Compassion for another’s suffering is oneness with others. To ease another’s headache is to forget one’s own. To mitigate another’s grief is to alleviate or dispel one’s own. The heart should melt at the suffering of others. If one wants to serve another person truly, one should try to please him in all respects and do such actions as can bring immense happiness. This will constitute real service.

Generally, people only try to please themselves under the camouflage of serving others. This is a serious mistake.

He who gives the handle of a sharp knife to another to hold, holding the sharp blade himself does real service. A real sevak rejoices in suffering and takes the most responsible, difficult, arduous and uninteresting work on his shoulders, killing his little self just to please others.

While serving another person, think that God has given an opportunity to improve, correct and mould oneself by service. Never say, “I have helped that man,” but say, “That man gave me an opportunity to serve. This service has helped me to purify my mind and I am extremely grateful to him.” Service should always be rendered cheerfully and willingly, without a sour Sunday face or castor oil face and without grumbling.

What is the essence of Sivananda Yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Two people in the world have contributed immensely to realize yoga and the purpose of yoga. One was Sage Patanjali, who described the *sadhanatmak* approach, the sequential approach to yoga. After a gap of hundreds of years, Swami Sivananda took the philosophy of yoga one step beyond Sage Patanjali.

Sage Patanjali confined himself to the *sadhanatmak*, the practical aspect, and Swami Sivananda brought in the component of *vyavaharatmak*, the applied, expressive aspect. When the spiritual aspirant is established in the meditative state and has acquired stable wisdom, *sthitaprajna*, he may live his life like a normal person, but his intentions and motivations, the direction of the flow of his energies have changed. Previously they were selfish, now they are selfless; previously they were self-oriented and self-centred, now they are universal and expansive. Previously he only thought of his pleasure and happiness, now he thinks of the pleasure and happiness of others.

Initially, actions were performed to satisfy oneself, now they are intended to uplift another person. Initially, the service provided to others involved an expectation, now there is no expectation but only *kartavya*, inherent duty.

Previously those considered one's own were helped, now actions reach out to everyone. That is atmabhava. Meditation has to eventually give birth to atmabhava.

Atmabhava is the ability to see oneself reflected in another person. People see their reflection in their offspring and are connected with them, sympathize with them, love them and believe that the child is theirs because it is born of their womb. They are able to see a reflection of the nature of their soul in that child. However, when they are able to see their reflection in everyone, it is called atmabhava. Service happens most efficiently when there is atmabhava.

An incident in Swami Sivananda's life illustrates atmabhava. One day a pilgrim on his way to Badrinath came to him. In those days there were no roads or cars, only bullock-carts and the pilgrim's two legs. That particular pilgrim was sick. He came to Swami Sivananda's dispensary, described his problem and Swami Sivananda gave him some medicine. The pilgrim went on his way. Three hours later, Swami Sivananda felt that the medicine was not the appropriate one and a better one could have been given instead. He called Swami Satyananda and said, "Locate that pilgrim and give him this medicine for it is the better one. I have given him the wrong medicine." This was not an easy task for Swami Satyananda!

This is a story of atmabhava. It was not necessary for Swami Sivananda to go through this motion of compassion. He did not ignore the suffering of any individual or his responsibility, his commitment, dharma or duty, for he saw the divine presence in everyone.

Seva is the only way that God has given to ensure that others are helped. Seva means cooperation. In nature everything exists for others. The human being is the only creature who lives for himself alone. Until and unless this selfish, self-centred human being is convinced and has the strength of character to walk the path of seva, he will not be able to achieve anything.

Seva is the first expression of Swami Sivananda's yoga, which begins after having come to the state of meditation and atmabhava. As the spiritual aspirant serves more and more, as he connects himself with people more and more, he purifies himself internally and an unconditioned love emanates from his being, touching everyone. The love of an enlightened being is universal and unconditional. Just as the rays of the sun shine equally on all, the love that radiates from an enlightened being embraces all.



4

Work is Worship

PRACTICAL SEVA

How can one learn to use work as worship?

Swami Sivananda: The aspirant should give his hands to the work and his mind to the Lord, like the harmonium player who plays and talks at the same time, or the woman who knits and jokes with her friends. Through practice he will be able to do two things at the same time.

Though the cow grazes in the pasture while separated from the calf, her mind remains fixed on the calf. Similarly, one should fix the mind on God when doing *japa* and put the hands to work. This is a dynamic and effective way of worshipping God.

How can service be perfected?

Swami Niranjanananda: One should just be aware of service and try to improve each time. This awareness is not only a thought. A continuous effort has to be made to improve the way one serves others. Service is an art, not an act. In the perfection of the art one has to be aware of the problems and hitches, as well as the personal compulsions that may manifest and need to be confronted. The personal likes and dislikes have to be set aside at the time of service. One is not doing anything for oneself but to fulfil the needs of another person; therefore, the other person is the priority,

not oneself. There has to be sympathy for other people and the mind should be engaged in learning, knowing and recognizing different ways and methods of serving others.

What is needed to be able to help others?

Swami Satyananda: One needs to be qualified in order to help others. When one thinks of helping others, it is an emotion. Kindness is an emotion, but emotion won't help to actually do something. Ability as an inherent quality is needed to work. One must know about construction, agriculture, medicine and how to deal with human beings. Emotion in itself is not sufficient, even money is not sufficient. When it comes to actually doing something to help others, one must be practical. When the ashram received cows, rickshaws, handcarts, sewing machines in abundance, not all items were distributed due to practical considerations. The right recipient for every cow had to be found. The recipient had to have prior knowledge and the means to keep the cow. It could take almost one week to investigate one person.

There are rules about how seva should be undertaken. It has to be done in an organized manner. If things are simply distributed in the villages, it will make no difference in the long run. Actual help means enabling the villagers to generate their own strength and ability. There are other things to bear in mind. Good work requires effort, imagination and planning. If bad work needs planning and effort, good work needs more planning and hard work, and dedicated and imaginative staff.

What is the importance of planning?

Swami Niranjanananda: A person may plan for many days before committing a bad deed, but in the excitement of performing a good deed there is no planning and it becomes a failure. Karma yoga is planning an action and anticipating both the positive and negative outcomes, whereas karma is just running into action, without any anticipation of whether it is right or wrong.

One should live in the company of a thief in order to know the kind of planning that goes into a bad deed. A thief targets a house and observes what time the people come and go, what time the lights go on and off, when there is a lot or little traffic. He assesses which side of the house is safer to enter unnoticed, which lock can be broken, which window can be opened and what will be found inside. He determines which way to escape if there are people inside as well as an alternative escape route if there are police outside. Such intense planning is necessary to know which house to break into and which route to take just to steal a television set, a fridge, some jewellery and maybe some money. Yet there is no planning when one tries to do a good deed. That is not the spirit of seva.

Being selfless is an attitude in which the first consideration is the wellbeing of the other person. That consideration motivates the course of action and its implementation. Karma yoga and seva mean planning and implementation. At least an equal intensity of planning is required to implement a good, beautiful and positive deed. A good deed requires not only equal but even better planning than a negative deed.

How can householders with family responsibilities do selfless work for others?

Swami Satyananda: Action performed not for oneself but for others is selfless action. In fact, in *grihastha ashrama*, householder life, there is more possibility for selfless action, since everything a householder produces and does is not for himself, but for his wife, children, kith and kin, dependants and the society in which he lives. Everyone owes a large debt to society. If society becomes unstable, one will not be able to go to a shop, buy or sell goods or go to the bank. In order to repay the debt to society, one has to put aside a part of one's earnings. It is necessary for the well-off sectors to support and uplift the weaker sectors of society who are in need. If the deprived sector is neglected, people will not be able to live and trade in security.

Industries should allocate a part of their profits for the poorer sections of society, for the have-nots. Whatever one produces or earns should be distributed judiciously between oneself, one's children, one's dependants, hospitals, education, and so on. Such a distribution of wealth must be carried out. When that level of consciousness develops, an unbelievable awakening takes place within one's *chetana*, consciousness, or *atman*, soul.

How can business people practise selfless service?

Swami Sivananda: An industrialist must look after the welfare of his workers, as their labour helps to build his prosperity. He should know that God gave him industrial acumen, organizational genius and money power to promote the welfare of the community. He should use his special talents and wealth for the common good first and increase his own prosperity later. He should become a promoter of the progress and welfare of the human race and derive true happiness and peace in addition to material profit!

How can people who are not wealthy help others?

Swami Satyananda: It is not necessary to be a millionaire in order to serve the downtrodden. Material help is not the only form of service. Regardless of a person's financial or social status, he can serve by offering physical work, professional skills and genuine empathy and compassion. Sweet speech and sympathetic utterances are also an aspect of service. One's dharma is to help others, to help elderly widows, the blind and those with leprosy. Do not misbehave with beggars, who are one's unfortunate brothers, but analyze their plight. Although it is not compulsory to give a coin, one must not rebuke them and thereby break an innocent and already broken heart. Not everybody can spend fifty or sixty thousand rupees to educate and marry a boy or girl, but the debt owed to society can surely be repaid in one way or another.

How can selfless service be practised by ordinary people?

Swami Sivananda: God has endowed each person with certain talents and marked the field of service for him. Wisdom lies in finding out those talents and using them in selfless service to humanity in accordance with His will. A person can do selfless service according to his ability and station in life. An advocate can plead for poor people without accepting fees, a doctor can treat the poor free of charge, a teacher or professor can give free tuition to poor children and supply them with books. A person can have a medicine chest of twelve tissue remedies, some allopathic or homeopathic medicines, and serve the poor and sick with *atmabhava*, the feeling of oneness with all.

People can learn first aid and help in cases of emergency. They can serve in any social institution for one hour daily without any remuneration and give one-tenth of their income in charity. They can serve their parents, elders, teachers, guests and the underprivileged in their neighbourhood. They can feed the hungry, nurse the sick, clothe the naked, educate the illiterate and raise the downtrodden. They can comfort the afflicted, lighten the sadness of the depressed and cheer up a person who is in distress by loving words. They can help animals and people who are in distress and wipe away their tears. However, whatever service is rendered should be done regularly.

These are all different forms of *seva*. One can be a lamp to those who have lost their way, or a boat and bridge to those who want to reach the other shore of immortality. This is the highest yoga.

How did the idea of helping your neighbours in Rikhia come about?

Swami Satyananda: This was not an idea; it was an order I heard! It was not my choice; it was God's choice. What the servant does is not the choice of the servant, it has to be the choice of the master. That is known as *seva*. I came to Rikhia in 1989. On 14th January 1990, I made a *sankalpa* to repeat

my mantra 10,800,000 times. It took me three hundred days to complete the mantra repetitions at the rate of ten hours per day. Towards the end I heard the voice of God, “Love your neighbours as I have loved you. Provide them with the same facilities I have provided for you.” This was a clear mandate.

Swamis are resourceful people and within ten to fifteen days they had collected hundreds of thousands of rupees. A few days before this happened, a lady from the neighbourhood had come asking for five or six hundred rupees. Her house had burned down and she wanted some relief, so her house was the first one to be constructed.

In the meantime the sannyasins needed to be trained. One swami from Orissa knew how to build houses. Another from France knew how to make bricks and was in charge of the brick kiln. Hundreds of thousands of bricks were produced and fired with coal from Dhanbad. The government permitted us to collect the sand required. A lorry and tractor were provided and the sand picked up from the river bed. The thatch came from Munger district. There were good engineers in Deoghar, who provided free designs for rural housing.

The villagers have different needs to townsfolk. They need more space and a flat is not adequate. In the towns and cities two rooms are enough for a family and a bathroom is a necessity. However, for villagers a bathroom is not necessary, but a kitchen, a separate sleeping area for the older family members and space for cattle are a must. A prototype was made to show people the house that would be built for them. It had two rooms and four verandas so that the villagers could keep their hay, fodder, firewood and cattle in the house and sleep inside.

What is practical sadhana?

Swami Satyananda: If a child is born in a poor family, at least a crib should be given to the child. When a child is born in one's own family, immediately a crib is provided and

elaborate preparations are made. However, when there is a newborn in another family, only good wishes and greetings are conveyed, which do not help him in any way. One should go to the house, give a warm sweater for the child, some tonic for the mother and some money.

This is a practical sadhana. One day, the mason of the ashram told a swami that his wife had given birth to twins and he wanted to have names for them. I told the swami to forget about naming them, but to give them a crib, medicine and take a doctor or nurse to treat any wounds with antiseptic. Names can be given the next day or in nine days. There is no urgency.

What does helping others mean according to your experience?

Swami Satyananda: Every year, on 8th September, the birthday of my guru Swami Sivananda, a permanent business for one family is created; for example, helping to start a small shop selling little things like sweets, biscuits, chocolates, pens and pencils. It is an investment of four, five or six thousand rupees. In Munger, I had a list of people in need of help, and on 8th September they were called and asked to open a shop to sell cosmetics, bangles, and so on, and the ashram financed it.

In Rikhia I gave assistance to a widow whose husband used to make bricks for the building project. She was given seven hundred rupees, bought bangles and sold them for a profit. I opened such a shop for one of my neighbours who is an invalid. Only a few days ago I met him with his daughters and enquired, "How are you doing?" He said, "Swamiji, I am doing well." I said, "I am happy." That night I had a good sleep as that man's agonies were released from my thoughts. The next day a tricycle arrived from Rajnandgaon so I called him and said, "I have a tricycle for you. Now you will be able to purchase your provisions without any problems." That man is out of my mind. Some karmas of agony and adversity are still lurking, but the troublesome karmas are all coming out.

I have been working in spiritual life since the age of eighteen. I started my spiritual career with tantric practices, spent twelve years with my guru, twelve years as a wandering mendicant and twenty years at Bihar School of Yoga. During those years the only inner enlightenment I received was what I read in books. Since coming to Rikhia I have been thinking, "How can I help this family? How can I help that little girl who is suffering from polio or arthritis?" These ideas come to me all the time, even in dreams.

One night I was dreaming of a lady whose husband was sick. He was given a cycle rickshaw but he cannot ride it. She is young, maybe thirty-five, and has two children. In the dream I saw that she was approaching an officer, and I knew she would somehow have a job in a government department, earning maybe two thousand rupees a month, enough for her family to live on. Such thoughts are not worldly but spiritual. I am talking about bread and butter. Last year, the ashram built a house for this woman. She is being looked after but no money is given. A shop is being organized for her so that she can be independent. Helping others has become my obsession and my passion.

I do not make any prayers to God. He knows what I need. I am His servant. He has asked me to do the work that is being done in the villages of Rikhia, so I am doing it. He provides me with the means and I will do it for as long as He asks me.

I was asked to give a 'good luck kit' to every girl who marries in this area. This is no joke, as each kit costs a lot of money. Few Indians can afford thirty to fifty thousand rupees. The ashram is able to provide 'good luck kits' to thousands of girls who are getting married. I do not have enough girls to give God's provisions to. Swami Satyananda is only the servant, the medium, the agent who does not provide anyone with anything. Whatever is done, God does it.

If seven hundred rupees can provide employment and sustenance to someone in need, that is a beautiful affair. It can be done through ashrams in every state and district. If the sadhus in India were a little more aware, they could do a

lot of work. However, such work should only be done through personal experience and realization. When God inspires a person to do seva, he takes it as His blessing. The work and seva carried out in Rikhia is not discharged as social service, but in compliance with God's will and command. Whoever comes to Rikhia must come with the intention of helping others.

If somebody has to be helped somewhere, in any part of the world, through me or somebody else, it is God who is helping. My teachers have infused a great love for service in me and have trained me to feel supreme bliss and eternal satisfaction in service. This is the secret of my happiness. Service alone supersedes sacrifice and devotion. Service makes *jnana*, wisdom, perfect. Life devoid of service is much worse than a futile death. I will be happy if people can feel love and compassion for these villagers, if they can think about everyone who is less fortunate than themselves.

LOKASANGRAHA

How can the world be used?

Swami Satyananda: The world is not to be shunned. It is a place to be used in order to remove one's faults and imperfections. There are many people who regard spiritual life, including yoga, as being divorced from day-to-day activities and life in general. This is completely wrong.

What is the idea of lokasangraha?

Swami Sivananda: The ideal of the social ethics in the *Bhagavad Gita* is *lokasangraha*, the wellbeing and solidarity of the world. The fabric of society is to be so constituted as to aid its members to realize the supreme ideal of life. The perfection of the part is the unity of the whole. When each one does his duty without reluctance or desire, the welfare of society is ensured. The *Bhagavad Gita* ends by saying (18:78):

*Yatra yogeshvarah krishno yatra paartho dhanurdharah;
Tatra shreervijayo bhootirdhruvaa neetirmatirmama.*

Wherever is Krishna, the Lord of yoga, wherever is Arjuna, the wielder of the bow, there are prosperity, happiness, victory and firm policy; such is my conviction.

Only when life is lived with this noble spirit of dedication to the common and supreme good, which is to be realized in God alone and nowhere else, is the wellbeing and prosperity of society secure. Society is nothing but a collection of individuals and the world but a manifestation of God.

When doing seva, who should be served?

Swami Niranjanananda: Not only the neighbour who lives next door in a house or a flat. One should serve the have-nots, downtrodden, weak and poor, not because society views them as helpless, but because they are part of the human family. If there are three children in the family and the eldest is healthy and strong, the youngest is bright and brilliant and the middle one is blind and weak, which one will the parents care for the most? Not the strong, bright and brilliant ones, but the one who is weak will receive the best care. Similarly, in society it is the duty of those who have to help those who are categorized as have-nots.

Is social service karma yoga?

Swami Sivananda: The value of social work is purely subjective. A person does not make himself a great reformer or saviour of mankind, but he offers his ego at the altar of universal love and so obtains purity of mind, the basis of spiritual progress. For a realized soul, however, service is an urge born out of compassion for his fellow beings. Mere philanthropic work done out of sympathy, without devotion and knowledge, is nothing more than social scavenging; it is not yoga or worship. It is on a lower plane and cannot elevate a person whose progress will be dull and slow. It is the mental attitude or *bhava* that does immense good and gives quick realization and purification of the heart.

Is giving money to charity or performing social service karma yoga?

Swami Satyananda: It is easy to deceive oneself into thinking that karma yoga can be practised in this way. This notion, however, is really false and leads to delusion. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (16:15–16):

*Aadhyo'bhijanavaanasmī ko'nyo'sti sadriśho mayāa;
Yakshye daasyaami modishya ityajnaanavimohitaah.*

*Anekachittavibhraantaā mohajaalasamaavritaah;
Prasaktaah kaamabhogeshu patanti narake'shuchau.*

"I am rich and born in a noble family. Who else is equal to me? I will sacrifice; I will give; I will rejoice." Thinking thus, deluded by ignorance, (15)

Bewildered by many a fancy, entangled in the snare of delusion, and addicted to the gratification of lust, they fall into a foul hell. (16)

Many people perform various types of philanthropic work, donating huge sums of money to trusts and benevolent societies, or organizing charities and social services. These acts bring many material benefits to others, so in this sense they are positive and worthwhile. However, these benefactors do not necessarily achieve meditative experiences as they are often doing 'selfless work' for a selfish purpose, for an ulterior motive, such as admiration or status.

People say that it is a duty to help others. This is a noble sentiment, but usually pervaded with a strong odour of hypocrisy. It is not necessary to be a social welfare worker to practise karma yoga. The work in hand has to be done with as little sense of ego as possible, whether it is farming, nursing, engineering or office work. The attitude and feeling are what is important, not the action itself.

When work is done for a spiritual purpose, it becomes karma yoga; otherwise it is merely work. A tribesman kills an animal for food, while a hunter kills an animal for

sport. The action is the same, but the motive is different. With karma yoga the attitude must be changed, not necessarily the action. A change in the action without a corresponding change in attitude never leads to any significant experience.

The more aware an individual becomes, the less selfish he will be. When karma yoga is practised, one actually starts to help other people for their sake and less for one's own sake. In the initial stages of karma yoga, it is important to realize that any work undertaken under the guise of philanthropy is more than likely motivated by an egotistical reason. One should accept this and not try to project an altruistic image. By practising karma yoga, one helps oneself by gradually purifying the mind, increasing concentration and becoming more content. As a by-product one helps other people, either directly or indirectly.

Doesn't putting the needs of others ahead of one's own lead to exploitation?

Swami Satyananda: I lived with my guru, who always put the needs of others first. However, he did not lose anything, but gained by that approach materially. His name and fame spread and he became great and the guru of thousands of Hindus, Muslims, Christians and people from all walks of life.

It is not true that a person with this attitude can be subject to exploitation or misuse. Putting the needs of others before one's own should be part of one's personality. This attitude should not just arise from charitable, altruistic or humanitarian ideals, but as an expression of one's dharma and nature. Then a change takes place also in the personality of the people helped and they are transformed. In this way, saints, sages, sadhus, mahatmas and divine messengers have transformed the lives of many people.

How can a person avoid being exploited?

Swami Niranjanananda: Only idiots are exploited. If one is sincere, true to the cause, simply being oneself without

expectations, there is no way one can be exploited by anybody or any power in this world. Swami Satyananda once gave the following answer, “If you remain true to yourself, nothing can exploit you. The difficulty comes the moment you try to adopt different roles in life for the satisfaction of the mind and emotions.”

If the element of ego can be removed from service, people who try to exploit will be unsuccessful, as no ego is involved. People allow others to exploit them for their own ego satisfaction. If someone stronger imposes his ego, it is exploitation. Therefore, *viveka*, discrimination, is needed; one has to back out when necessary and go forward when necessary.

Who will look after the person who helps?

Swami Satyananda: When a person helps others, he is helping himself. Most people’s aspirations are woven around their little family, business and whims. They do not take any notice of those who need to be noticed but are lying unnoticed. When a person takes care of others, God and nature will take care of his welfare. This law has been historically tested and found correct. God helps those who help others, not only themselves. It is said in the Bible (Proverbs 14:31):

If you give to the poor, your needs will be supplied.

Whatever a person may have has been given by God. It has not been given by his father, forefathers, relatives, government or employer. Once this truth is realized, there is the understanding that one’s assets are meant for the benefit of others and not just for oneself.

The whole world is a family unit. When a person realizes this, there is no place for the government in his life. The gods themselves will descend upon the earth to make his world a heaven! If a person is ablaze with a fiery determination to help others, he will be endowed with capacities. However, this does not mean that he should stage a drama of his ideals. Great ambition and burning aspiration

to help others should be developed gradually. Therefore, by helping the needy one helps oneself.

People think too much about themselves and their children, husband or wife. One should think about oneself a little bit, but not too much. One should think about oneself and others alike. The society which takes care of others is a secure society. One feels secure in a society where people are always concerned about each other.

In a country where society and its people have a tendency to help others, there are no social problems. It is a happy country on account of its philosophy of helping others. Helping others has been the greatest philosophy of society. The *Ramacharitamanas* says that there is no dharma superior to doing good to others, and no meanness inferior to troubling others. This is the ultimate philosophy if one wants to change society. When humankind learns how to live and serve one another, be kind and tolerant to one another, share problems, worries and ideas, the family, society and world will be a better place to live in.

People's energy should be used to raise the level of consciousness of others. They should live to make the world a better place. If actions are performed as a service to the evolution of all beings, everyone will enjoy a life of utter freedom, simplicity and bliss. What is needed will be bestowed as blessings from God, and no one will ever feel lonely or suffer any ills. When the mind is at peace with itself, the body attains health. People are drawn to such a person, like bees to nectar.

What is the need for seva?

Swami Satyananda: In India, people need bread, clothing and a house. The need of the American and European societies is knowledge. They have enough money and abundant comfort, so they can sit and rest. They may wonder what else there is to do, so they decide to read the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Ramayana* and other scriptures. After taking mantra from their guru, they chant *Rama, Rama*.

In the villages, there are children who do not have enough to eat and go to sleep hungry. On the one hand, people say that the whole world is their soul, and on the other, a child is lying at home sick, unhappy and without enough food to eat. In India, at least forty percent of the population does not eat daily. Most people do not have compassion, kindness and concern in their heart, their *pranas* have become hard. They need to start thinking about others, especially the deprived. This is the basis of all religions. In Sanskrit, it is called *paramartha chintan*, thinking for others. This thinking should be part of people's lives, earnings, thoughts, power, skills and resources. Swami Vivekananda said, "There is no greater dharma than service of living beings."

What are the effects of serving others?

Swami Satyananda: The ashram at Rikhiapeth ploughed about one hundred and fifty acres of land for people who do not have a pair of oxen. One person has an ox and another person has another ox, but by the time they pair up the oxen and plough each other's fields in turn, the position of the planets has changed and it is no longer auspicious to sow seeds.

One year, as the planets moved into position, the swamis of the ashram gathered the people of the village together and did an efficient job with the tractor. They left at six in the morning and ploughed all day. In the evening, they returned covered in wet mud, but they had found contentment in the service of others.

When a person serves others he feels satisfaction, sleeps well and has good thoughts and feelings. It is a pleasure which cannot be explained or expressed. When a person works for others and not for himself, it brings immense joy, which is called *ananda*, bliss. If a person lives only for himself and his family, he cannot be happy. A person and his family are nothing in this universe; his life has meaning only when he lives for others.

There is a saying, *Paropakaraaya sataam vibhootaya* – good people live for the welfare of others or, in other words, the virtues of the noble and great are used for the good of others. An apple tree does not eat its own apples, rivers do not drink their own water. That is doing good for others without expectation. If the mind functions like this, every meditation leads to greater harmony. About the necessity of supporting others, King Bhartrihari said:

Sheshnag carries the whole load of the universe on his hood alone.

But Sheshnag himself is supported on the back of Koorma, a gigantic tortoise.

Koorma himself in turn is supported with respect, on the lap of the ocean.

How peculiar that all the great forces of Nature are supported by others.

How can householders apply the ideal of seva in their lives?

Swami Satyananda: Householders should enlarge their scope of sadhana from mere asana, pranayama, japa and meditation to the service of those in need. This culture is called ‘care for the unfortunate’. A poet, writer or artist who is working with the media can inspire people to start thinking altruistically. The head of a panchayat or any social or political group can inspire people to live for others, not just for themselves.

The produce from one’s farm, the profit from one’s business, the salary from one’s job can be shared with the less fortunate. A mason or carpenter can help build a house. A brickmaker, a person who knows about agriculture, horticulture or animal husbandry should help in their field. Dharma is imparting know-how to those who lack knowledge. Dharma and satkarma are the foundations of spiritual life. God will definitely bless a person who cares for the unfortunate with peace and tranquillity.

What is the aim of life for a true sannyasin?

Swami Satyananda: The sannyasin has only one goal: to serve, live and work for the guru in a peaceful and correct way with an unfettered mind. The meaning of *sannyasa* is to sacrifice oneself for the sake of something. Sannyasa does not mean turning into an old man with a long beard. It means dedication, not renunciation. The meaning of sannyasa is *samarpan*, surrender, and not *tyaga*, renunciation. The word *nyasa* means 'to place oneself in a trust'. When a certain amount of money is allocated to help the poor, it is placed in a trust and dedicated. One does not take sannyasa for the sake of attaining God. The aim of sannyasa is not moksha, but seva.

A sannyasin knows that the ultimate goal is awareness of a greater reality beyond the body and this world. Although the dimensions are infinite, he does not worry and is not neurotic, for he knows he will reach it. The evolution of this self to the point of cosmic vision is his ultimate goal. Therefore, it is important that he lives in a community with the guru and does karma yoga to purify his mind. When the mind is purified, there is a spontaneous awakening and unfolding of the vast dormant potential.

A sannyasin is not limited by circumstances and does not create mental cobwebs around himself. There are many mental conditions, pains and pleasures in life that a human being creates for himself. No condition can create pressure on a sannyasin. If someone asks him for a bribe today, he can tell him to go to hell. A householder cannot do this, as his work may come to a standstill. Sannyasa is a life of growth in which one cannot be a slave to circumstances. A sannyasin is the master of his life.

If Narendra had not taken sannyasa, he could not have become Swami Vivekananda. In his life there were many circumstances that were obstacles on the path. The moment he took sannyasa, he removed the barriers which stood before him. Barriers are subjective; they are in the mind. A householder is bound by them, but a sannyasin is not. In the path of seva, he must make sure that the circumstances do

not become obstacles. Sannyasins should remain happy while imparting knowledge, doing their duties and serving all.

Sannyasa is a path adopted by people at different ages to work for the welfare of humanity. The eternal law for sannyasins is to live for others, whether they teach spiritual life or do social service. There are many negative influences in the cities, and people can easily go down the wrong lane. Many sannyasins guide them from the inauspicious path to the auspicious path of dharma. They speak of wisdom, atman, God, and what is positive and uplifting.

Crime will not be curbed until the individual minds of society address these subjects. The mind is under stress while thinking about money twenty-four hours a day. People are angry and experience social struggle, but when they hear the words of a sannyasin, their minds find some rest and ease. The sannyasin brings a necessary balance to society as he has nothing to do with politics or sects. He is engrossed in contemplation and concerned only with what is appropriate and inappropriate under the prevailing circumstances.

The basis of life for all saints is *paropakara*, helping others. Sannyasins are born to help others, not to help their own souls. They work for others as doctors, lawyers, writers, painters, engineers, teachers or speakers. Sannyasins and saints consider all people as their own.

What is the duty of sannyasins in the world?

Swami Satyananda: Geru robes, shaven head and a flowing beard do not make a sannyasin. A true sannyasin is a personification of *tyaga*, true renunciation and non-attachment. He is a representation of *tapas*, austerity and self-purification. Nyasa means trust. A trustee who spends the trust's money on his own children is misusing the trust. A sannyasin is a trustee of his wealth – his feelings, capabilities, body, intellect, money and house. He must use all the resources for others.

The goal of sannyasa is not to find God, to seek deliverance or personal peace, but to work for the amelioration of human

suffering. The world is on fire, the neighbourhood is burning and people are smugly sitting under the air-conditioner! The day is not far when the fire will engulf every house. Therefore, they should help to make the world cool, so that there is no need for an air-conditioner. When there is coolness and peace all around, everyone feels it.

The standard of sannyasins in the latter part of the twentieth century fell because sannyasa became a career, a profession, a way to obtain respect, honour, name, fame, disciples and limelight. The twenty-first century, however, brings new promise.

Sannyasins cannot be a symbol of enjoyment. They are not consumers but trustees. They are always rich but their riches do not belong to them. Whatever they receive they keep in the trust of society, and nobody has the right to breach that trust.

What is the best service to offer?

Swami Sivananda: If people's hunger is removed by giving food, it is temporary physical help. The want is removed for three hours, but the hunger manifests again and the person remains in the same miserable state. Building hospitals and establishments for the distribution of free food or clothes are not the highest kind of help as it does not eradicate the misery. The world continues to remain in a miserable state even if one builds millions of hospitals and feeding places. However, if a person attains *brahmajnana*, divine knowledge, and distributes this knowledge to remove people's ignorance, miseries and tribulations will be completely eradicated. The greatest service one can do in the world is to impart knowledge of the higher self. Spiritual help is the highest help one can render to humankind, and one realizes that the joy of selfless service is the greatest joy. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (18:68–69):

*Ya imam paramam guhyam madbhakteshva bhidhaasyati;
Bhaktim mayi paraam kritvaa maamevaishyat yasamshayah.*

*Na cha tasmaanmanushyeshu kashchinme priyakrittamah;
Bhavitaa na cha me tasmaadanyah priyatara bhuv.*

He who with supreme devotion to Me will teach this supreme secret to My devotees shall doubtless come to Me. (68)

Nor is there any among men who does dearer service to Me, nor shall there be another on earth dearer to Me than he. (69)

WORSHIP

Is charitable work karma yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Karma yoga is definitely not philanthropic or charitable work. Many people compare karma yoga to charity work. Providing food and shelter for those in need is a form of karma yoga, but often it is *sakama karma yoga*, action performed with the desire to gain merit, status or name and fame. This kind of charity work does not lead the practitioner to a meditative state. Social work cannot and should not be considered as *nishkama karma yoga*, action performed without any desire or personal motive.

The whole aim of karma yoga is to lead aspirants to an awakened state of consciousness. Good work is always encouraged by the guru. It may be beneficial to society, the sick, hungry and ignorant, but they are still in the dimension of maya where they are trapped, as in any other worldly activity. Good work is not sufficient to remove the veil of ignorance. This can only be achieved when a person accepts the tasks assigned to him and offers them to the guru and not to anyone else. Unless one is serving the guru or God within, social service in any form cannot be considered as a sadhana, because it produces karma rather than eliminating it.

A karma yogi should never consider himself as a social worker serving society. He does not serve society; he serves his guru. The guru's mission is to serve humankind, and due to his realization he possesses great power. The guru lives a

divine life on the earthly plane and in his service, the karma yogi learns to work with dedication, free from attachments and for the welfare of many.

Why is selfless service indispensable for the experience of the divine?

Swami Satyananda: God cannot be seen. The instrument used for seeing is blunt. There is the emotional attachment of selfishness and no sentiment of selfless service. People have the attitude that the whole world is for themselves and God has been forgotten. With this attitude, they can visit all the temples, but it will make no difference to their spiritual progress. If a tightly corked bottle of poison is left in the river Ganga for a thousand years, it will retain its poisonous character. It will not change into the water of the Ganga unless the cork is removed from the bottle!

When an aspirant performs rituals and worship, practises asana and pranayama, studies Vedanta and makes pilgrimages to Vaishnavi Devi and Kashi, he may wonder why God does not hear him. God is sitting right in his heart, but He is not ready to listen to the aspirant who does not recognize and feel the pain of others in the same way that he feels the pain of his own child. Until he is able to do this, his sadhana will not be successful. He has to spend a sleepless night thinking of the millions of poor people who go to bed hungry.

Until an aspirant is able to provide the basic needs of those who have nothing, there is no meaning to his religion, politics, national laws or spirituality. Therefore, one may not perform the rituals of worship or go on pilgrimages, but a compassionate and sympathetic heart is necessary. Compassion and sympathy are important qualities for every aspirant. The more one is aware of others, the more one is aware of God. When one is aware of others, one is aware of Him. Worship of humanity is worship of God.

The first pre-condition of *sadhana*, spiritual endeavour, is to recognize the misery, suffering and needs of humanity. Meditation is a good and necessary practice, but as long as

there is only selfishness in a person's heart, the cork of the bottle will remain forever sealed. As long as the cork is fixed in the mouth of the bottle, water cannot fill the bottle. The aspirant with an open heart ultimately realizes this truth and thinks that whatever he has belongs to God. Sadhana goes to waste when the aspirant's heart is closed to the suffering, woes and miseries of others and to the privations of the 'have-nots', like pouring water into a corked bottle.

Whatever the aspirant does or wishes to do in service of others also serves the purpose of self-cleansing. He is purified through selfless service, in the same way that he uses detergent to cleanse his linen. Selfless service is necessary for self-transformation, to cleanse the rajo and tamo gunas of the mind. *Nishkama seva*, selfless service, is like detergent for the aspirant. One can apply perfume and smell nice from the outside, but underneath there is the smell of a toilet. With a selfish, limited and crooked mind, one tries to smell better by putting on artificial perfumes. However, life must be shaped in the mould of charity in order to smell sweet from the inside.

The *Bhagavad Gita* says that one should perform work as worship and devote one's self to it without thinking of anything beyond. To worship God by serving the less fortunate is the highest form of worship. Ramana Maharshi said, "Acts performed without any attachment, in the spirit of service to God, cleanse the mind and point the way to liberation." Through the path of service the aspirant sees the development in his personality even without meditation or closing the eyes. The ordinary individual personality is transformed into a divine personality.

What are the spiritual results of karma yoga and seva?

Swami Sivananda: A karma yogi, who does his work as worship of God, surrenders his body, mind, soul and actions as offerings to the Lord, is ever absorbed in the Lord by constant thought of Him and loses himself in God-consciousness through total self-surrender. His will becomes one with the cosmic will. That is the last and most advanced

stage of spiritual realization. He realizes that whatever is going on in the world is but the *lila*, or divine sport, of the Lord. He realizes the truth of the utterances in the *Brahma Sutras*, *Lokavattu lila kaivalyam*, all is the play of the gods for the world. The karma yogi feels that he is one with the Lord and a partner in his *lila*. He lives for Him and in Him and his thoughts and actions are of God. The veil has dropped and the sense of separateness has been totally annihilated. He enjoys divine qualities, *aishwarya*, and is able to realize God in whatever situation he may be placed in life.

Can self-oriented, limiting karmas be transformed into offering and worship?

Swami Satyananda: Karma is not convertible, just as previously the rupee could not be converted. If dollars were required, they could only be purchased on the black market, but once the rupee became convertible it could be used to purchase foreign currency through the bank. Karmas have to be made convertible before investing them in *pooja*, worship. Just by thinking that whatever one does becomes *pooja* does not mean it will become *pooja*. The mind and emotions need to be involved to bring about a change. In order to do that a system is needed, like the process followed when exchanging currency.

In the international market, an exchange rate is necessary to change one currency into another. In the same way, there should be an exchange mechanism in the mind, a way of thinking, which will totally change the perception and outlook on life. It cannot be done by drinking alcohol and saying it is *somarasa*, a divine and intoxicating drink, or by eating non-vegetarian food and saying it is *maha prasad*.

Vama Khepa, a great shakti tantric who lived at the beginning of the twentieth century in Tarapeeth, West Bengal, used to drink, but he knew the mechanism. If everyone else started drinking like him, without knowing the exchange mechanism, what would happen? Black market! In the first stage of spiritual life, only the karma which is done

selflessly, without any expectations, becomes convertible and pooja. In later stages, all the work undertaken becomes convertible.

The karmas that I performed in Rishikesh were done with *nishkama bhava*, an attitude of selflessness. I used to clean utensils and vessels, wash clothes, manage the hospital, drive a bullock cart, cut grass, feed the animals and milk the cows. I did not do it for myself and never received any payment or external benefit. I believed that it was a disciple's duty to do the guru's work with an attitude of selflessness.

In Rishikesh, most of my karmas were converted into pooja. The personal karmas, *sakama* karmas, done with a selfish attitude and expectations, were not converted into pooja. In the ashram, there was hardly any time for personal work. I was in charge of the ashram and worked twenty-four hours a day. I had to wake up in the middle of the night to check that the watchman was awake. Whatever work I did in the ashram for my guru became my pooja, which helped me a lot later on. Guru seva is the convertible currency. Work with a selfish purpose is non-convertible currency.

To serve the suffering and motivate others to do the same is also a convertible currency. Seventy-five percent of the karmas become pooja and the remaining twenty-five percent can be left to God. The karmas are seventy-five percent pure and only twenty-five percent are adulterated. Even a twenty-four carat gold coin contains some copper and no ornament can be made without that. Let this twenty-five percent of adulteration remain, as without it the individual and the family cannot survive. The karmic ratio should be fifty percent guru seva, twenty-five percent service to the poor and down-trodden, and the remaining twenty-five percent for the welfare of the individual and family. Then the karmas are transformed into pooja or worship.

Why is dedication of action important in karma yoga?

Swami Satyananda: The karmas can be exhausted by offering them to God and by realizing that the doer is someone else.

The aspirant is only an instrument, a medium to carry out the action. Whatever he wants to do can become a sadhana provided he offers it to God. In the *Bhagavad Gita* it is stated (18:57):

*Chetasaa sarvakarmaani mayi sannyasya matparah;
Buddhiyogamupaashritya machchittah satatam bhava.*

Mentally renouncing all actions in Me, having Me as the highest goal, resorting to the yoga of discrimination always fix your mind on Me.

The feeling that ‘I am the doer’ must not be there. Whatever work a person does must have the feeling of dedication. For example, a person works in a shop but considers it to be his employer’s shop. He thinks that the owner has put him there to sell the items in the shop and deposit the money in the bank. It is the owner’s money, but he can spend it according to his needs. He does not have to give it to the owner. If the owner asks for money, he gives it. He runs the shop in the owner’s name. While performing his duty, he thinks of himself not as the owner but as the caretaker. In the same way, one should have the feeling that God is the owner. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (4:23):

*Gatasangasya muktasya jnaanaavasthitachetasah;
Yajnaayaacharatah karma samagram pravileeyate.*

To one who is devoid of attachment, who is liberated, whose mind is established in knowledge, who works for the sake of sacrifice, for the sake of God, the whole action is dissolved.

What is the importance of practising karma and bhakti yoga together?

Swami Satyananda: Karma yoga alone is not the mansion, it is the foundation. Karma yoga purifies the mind, cleans the dross and makes the lower mental attitudes feeble. It destroys mental blocks, but after that the aspirant has to practise

bhakti yoga along with it. When the mind is completely attuned to or engrossed in a higher being, that is bhakti yoga. Bhakti yoga helps to integrate the tendencies of the mind. Emotional and mental problems arise in meditation without the practice of karma and bhakti yoga. Karma and bhakti yoga must go hand in hand. Karma yoga cannot be practised without bhakti yoga.

The two important yogas for treating egocentricity properly are karma and bhakti yoga. The ego cannot be removed through psychoanalysis, self-analysis or repentance. People have tried but failed. In the West many people go to psychoanalysts and psychotherapists, but still the ego is destroying their family and social life. Therefore, there must be an emphasis on the practices of karma and bhakti yoga. The mind becomes one-pointed and surrenders to the supreme power, and one feels that existence is only due to the grace of God. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita* (18:46):

*Yatah pravrittirbhootaanaam yena sarvamidam tatam;
Svakarmanaa tamabhyarchya siddhim vindati maanavah.*

By worshipping Him from whom all beings have evolved and by whom all this is pervaded, through his own duty, man attains perfection.

What is the outcome of karma yoga and bhakti yoga when practised together?

Swami Sivananda: The aspirant should consecrate his acts to the Lord. He will be free of the bondage of karma and find freedom in action. He who tries to live in the spirit of bhakti is able to surrender to the Lord and gradually ascends the spiritual path step by step. His greedy nature is slowly dissolved. Eventually his whole life, together with his actions, thoughts and feelings, is dedicated to the service of the Lord. There is not a bit of egoism. His whole nature is transformed into divinity. In the *Bhagavad Gita* it is said (9:27):

*Yatkaroshi yadashnaasi yajjuhoshi dadaasi yat;
Yattapasyasi kaunteya tatkurushva madarpanam.*

Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give, whatever you practise as austerity, O Arjuna, do it as an offering unto Me!

When all actions are dedicated to the Lord, there is no rebirth. Just as the river joins the sea, abandoning its name and form, so the individual soul joins the supreme soul, giving up its name, form and egoistic desires. This is the simplest method of yoga. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita* (11:55):

*Matkarmakrinmatparamo madbhaktah sangavarjitah;
Nirvairah sarvabhooteshu yah sa maameti paandava.*

He who does all actions for Me, who looks upon Me as the Supreme, who is devoted to Me, who is free from attachment, who bears enmity towards no creature, he comes to Me, O Arjuna!

What is the effect of dedicating one's actions to God or the higher reality?

Swami Sivananda: A karma yogi should dedicate his actions to God with the feeling of self-surrender. The greater his devotion, the nearer he is to the Lord. He slowly begins to feel that God works directly through the body and senses. He feels no strain or burden in the discharge of work; the heavy load felt previously on account of false egoism vanishes out of sight, never to return. He is at ease. Adi Shankaracharya gives the following prayer for a karma yogi:

*Atma tvam girija matih sahachara pranah sareeram graham.
Puja te vishayopa bhoga rachana nidra samadhi sthitih.
Sancharah padayoh pradakshina vidhih stotrani sarvagiro.
Yadyat karma karomi tat tat akhilam Shambho tavaradhanam.*

You are my atma. Parvati is buddhi. The pranas are Your attendants; this body is Your house. The action of

sensual enjoyment is worship of You. Deep sleep is the establishment of samadhi. Walking is the perambulation around You. All my speeches are Your praise. Whatever actions I perform are all worship of You, O Shambhu!

How can ordinary daily activities become worship?

Swami Sivananda: The round of domestic duties has to be transformed into a spiritual process and become part of one's sadhana. By making one's essential attitude spiritual, one can divinize any work. The same framework of external physical attitude continues, but the work idea disappears and worship remains in its stead. Work is transmuted into worship through the spiritual approach and attitude towards it.

Every act can be spiritualized when the motive becomes pure, and one is able to work for the wellbeing of the world, *lokasangraha*. A doctor working in a hospital should think that all the patients are manifestations of God. The body is the moving temple of God and the hospital is a big temple. He should say, "I am doing all my actions to please God, not to please my superiors." He should say, "*Om Tat Sat Krishnarpanamastu*, offering to Krishna, or *Om Tat Sat Brahmarpanamastu*, offering to Brahma," at the end of the day and at night when he retires to bed.

A person should think and feel that he lives, works and breathes only for God every second of his life, and that life is absolutely useless without Him. He should feel pangs of separation if he forgets Him even for a fraction of a second while at work and think that his hands are the hands of Lord Shiva. In the beginning some actions may be selfish and others unselfish, but, in the long run, he can do all actions in an unselfish manner, though continuous scrutiny of his motives is necessary.

Acts like eating, walking, talking, breathing, sleeping and answering the calls of nature become yogic activities and work becomes worship. Service is worship of the Lord; this should never be forgotten.

One who sees *Brahman*, the immortal soul, in the spoon, the medicine, the patient, the doctor and in service, verily reaches Brahman, the eternal. This is the great secret – one has to spiritualize all actions and through practice transmute them into yoga. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (4:24):

*Brahmaarpanam brahma havirbrahmaagnau brahmanaa
hutam;*

Brahmaiva tena gantavyam brahmakarmasamaadhinaa.

Brahman is the oblation; Brahman is the ghee; by Brahman is the oblation poured into the fire of Brahman; Brahman verily shall be reached by him who always sees Brahman in action.



5

The Gift of Life

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE

How can karma yoga be summarized?

Swami Satyananda: The aim of karma yoga is to become the perfect reflector of the cosmic consciousness in the arena of the manifested world. Usually this perfection is impossible to attain due to personal whims which have to be eradicated. When one no longer considers oneself to be the doer but merely the instrument, everything that one does becomes spiritual and perfect. Actions become super-efficient. One becomes the expert of experts in action, and the least effort produces the greatest results. The individual has equanimity of mind in all situations. An instrument cannot become angry, upset or egotistical. It is the ego and personal desires that make one react adversely with others and the environment.

Karma yoga develops the faculty of concentration, which is essential in all fields and spheres of life. It vastly improves the benefits that one gains from meditation practices.

Higher stages of karma yoga become meditation. While performing actions, the karma yogi reposes in the state of meditation even amongst the most intense activity. The karma yogi rests, floats, dissolves in the divine bliss of higher awareness. The object acted upon, the actions themselves and the karma yogi become one and the same. This is real meditation and real karma yoga.

Awareness is essential in karma yoga. It is important to develop the ability to do the work while simultaneously being a witness to the actions. One should aim to become a detached, disinterested observer. Though seemingly a paradox, the karma yogi is able to work more efficiently in this manner without being swayed by personal whims and prejudices, or motivated by likes or dislikes. He does what is necessary in the given circumstances from the core of his being, the inner self.

How should aspirants face difficulties in karma yoga?

Swami Sivananda: At the beginning aspirants may find it difficult to practise karma yoga due to the ego-ridden impure mind. They have to be strict and firm with the mind and not listen to selfish promptings. They should draw inspiration and courage from communion in the silent hours of prayer. They should not think too much about *nishkama karma*, selfless service, but just begin somewhere. If one works with the right intention and spirit, the way will be open.

Does the practice of karma yoga require a particular way of life?

Swami Satyananda: Karma yoga is a wonderful yogic path that is open to everyone. It is an easy yoga which anyone can practise as everyone is performing action, whether internal or external. The brain and nervous systems are acting as well. Writing, digging or washing are external actions; thinking, the flowing of blood, the functioning of glands are interior actions. One becomes aware of actions through which this reality, this universal consciousness and perception can be realized. The personality evolves in each and every performance in life.

Everybody should try to transform life and the actions performed in the spirit of karma yoga. Whether one is a householder or an ascetic, it makes no difference. The practice of karma yoga purifies. A person can do any action in this way and it will not bind him. There is obviously

no need for renunciation, for giving up or accepting something. Karma yoga only requires training the mind in a certain way. It is a mental renunciation that can be done in any profession.

How can karma yoga be practised and perfected?

Swami Sivananda: The yoga of the *Bhagavad Gita* is an art. While doing karma yoga, one should use this body-machine in selfless work and feel that one is only an instrument in the hands of God, or a witness of the activities of prakriti.

God should be worshipped in the poor and the sick. Mental poise should be maintained amidst the toil and troubles of the world without considerations of success or failure, respect or disrespect, pleasure or pain. With a balanced mind, firmly rooted in the higher self amidst all activities; one becomes a true karma yogi.

The aspirant must keep in mind the examples of the great karma yogis who served humankind and thus radiated peace, bliss and wisdom. He should do constant selfless service silently with thoughts of God and *bhava*, feeling, within, and realize the indwelling presence. A true karma yogi expands and purifies the heart and realizes the true glory of karma yoga.

What are the components of karma yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Karma yoga begins with awareness and understanding of the action. The second component is full participation and involvement. The third component is the belief that whatever one does, it is for the first, last and only time in one's life. The fourth component is creativity, thinking of the best and most creative way to apply oneself to complete the task. The fifth component is to be without expectation, and the sixth is *atmashuddhi*, internal purification of ideas, thoughts and aspirations. Everything falls into place in the state of *atmashuddhi*; the karma yogi attains balance and inner harmony. The seventh component is monitoring one's responses and reactions.

How do jnanis and bhaktas practise karma yoga?

Swami Sivananda: The mental state of non-attachment to the fruits of work can be achieved in two ways: one is jnana yoga and the other bhakti yoga. The student of Vedanta, or jnana yoga, develops *sakshi bhava*, the feeling of being a witness, through discrimination and self-analysis. He says, “I am the silent witness of the mental modifications and the work done by the different organs of the body. I am distinct from the body, organs, mind and prana. Prakriti does everything, the gunas operate, the swabhava functions, and the indriyas do their respective dharmas. Everything is the dharma of the mind; I have nothing to do. I am *udasina*, I am indifferent. I have only *tatastha*, neutrality. I do not want any fruits.

“This world is *anitya*, impermanent, and *mithya*, unreal. There is no real happiness in this world. There are countless *doshas*, limitations, in worldly life. There is supreme, eternal, infinite bliss in the atman within. In reality I am *satchidananda*, the supreme reality. I use the indriyas, mind, prana and body as my instruments for the wellbeing of the world, for *lokasangraha*. The whole world is my atman and my body. The whole universe is my home. The atman is *nishkriya* or *akarta*, the non-doer, *niravayava*, without any limbs, and *avyavahara*, free from worldly concern.”

The jnani realizes that he is different from the active principle in him. He does constant *vichara*, reflection, and becomes established in his *swaroopa*, his real nature. He burns the results of his actions in the fire of wisdom through reflection. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (4:37):

*Yathaidhaamsi samiddho'gnirbhasmasaatkurute'vjuna;
Jnaanaagnih sarvakarmaani bhasmasaatkurute tathaa.*

As the blazing fire reduces fuel to ashes, O Arjuna, so does the fire of knowledge reduce all actions to ashes!

A bhakta practises self-surrender and *Ishwararpana*, dedicating his actions to the Lord. He says, “I am an instrument in the hands of my Beloved. I have no individual will. I am

Yours, my Lord. All is Yours. Your will be done. You are everything; You do everything. Even an atom cannot move without You. Even a leaf cannot move without You. You work through my organs, You speak through my mouth. I offer to You whatever I do or eat. I offer to You my tapas. You can do whatever You like. I live and work for You alone. I cannot live without You even for one second.”

Karma yoga is not mere mechanical action. The vedantic bhava and the bhakti bhava should be kept up during action or service. Every act must be turned into a brick to construct a canal through which the thought of God flows freely and continuously – for this life is precious.

When should the practice of karma yoga begin?

Swami Satyananda: Once a person discovers his inner conflicts, it is time to take up karma yoga in order to transform the daily activities and make them conducive to spiritual progress. Psychology has brought to notice that there are thousands and thousands of people on this blessed earth who do not want to know what they are. The moment they discover their nature they react with fear and disbelief, which is holding them back. Each and every item that is lurking in the depths of consciousness, whether birth or death, loss or gain, praise or criticism, love or hate, conflict or peace, passion or anger, must become well-known.

If a person discovers and understands his conflicts and problems, still they remain with him. Therefore, he has to begin sadhana, the practical side of yoga. In the *Bhagavad Gita* sadhana begins with karma yoga. Daily activities have to be transformed in such a way that they are conducive to spiritual progress. A person expresses himself through actions and thus unburdens his soul. Side by side with karma yoga, he should also practise raja yoga, bhakti yoga and jnana yoga, in order to be victorious in battle and eliminate the conflicts that are lurking in the personality. When the mind is completely free from the influence and association of conflicts, he is a liberated person, a *jivanmukta*.

How does karma yoga beautify life?

Swami Niranjanananda: Actions or karmas are like seeds planted in one's consciousness which, in the course of time, grow into trees. The seed which is planted today will become a tree, bearing fruits and flowers in the future. If the tree which grows from that seed is sick and weak with bugs eating it away from inside, the gardener chops it down and plants a new one. Who is able to chop down the tree which is infirm and rotten from inside? Everyone carries the dead tree and that effect is the karma which is carried on from generation to generation, from life to life. We find the same idea in the New Testament when Jesus says (John 15:1-2):

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.
Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away,
and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that
it may bear more fruit.

In karma yoga, one needs to acquire the ability to recognize the strength of the tree. If the tree is hale and hearty, it can be left, but it still needs pruning. The tree is trimmed and pruned by looking at it from all angles, finding out where the sickness lies, which branch is affected or already dead and needs to be chopped off.

Thousands of years ago it was said that in order to disconnect the karmas, it is necessary to have a sharp instrument, which is comprised of detachment, *vairagya*, and discrimination, *viveka*. Detachment is the sharp edge and discrimination is the handle. One holds the handle of discrimination and uses the sharp edge of detachment to prune the karma. In this way, the seed planted today will become fruitful in years to come. This is the theory and the practice of karma yoga.

Why is karma yoga easy and difficult at the same time?

Swami Niranjanananda: The path of karma yoga is the most simple yet, at the same time, the most difficult to follow. Everyone lives in their own little world. When one tries to come

out of that little world, situations are encountered which are totally new and unknown and which do not conform to one's beliefs, ideas or previous experience. There is uncertainty and insecurity due to lack of control over the situation. If one climbs back into one's world of ideas, karma yoga fails.

However, when the practice of karma yoga begins to transform the personality and limitations are encountered, karma yoga becomes a hard process. Hatha yoga can be perfected in no time, even raja, kriya and kundalini yoga can be taught in a course, but karma yoga takes a lifetime to perfect. It involves a different dimension of the personality, yet nothing else remains to be known once karma yoga is perfected.

Does karma yoga need to be perfect in order to be effective?

Swami Sivananda: In the practice of karma yoga, there is no loss of effort. If a religious ceremony is left incomplete, it is a waste, as the performer cannot realize the fruits. In the case of karma yoga, every action causes immediate purification of the heart. In agriculture there is uncertainty. The farmer may plough the land and sow the seeds, but he may not harvest a crop if there is no rain. In karma yoga there is no uncertainty and no chance of any harm or transgression resulting from it.

Anything done on the path of karma yoga, however little it may be, saves one from the great fear of being caught in the wheel of birth and death. Sri Krishna praises karma yoga in order to create interest in Arjuna.

A person without doubt reaps jnana, the fruit on the path of karma yoga. A little practice with the right mental attitude purifies the chitta where the samskaras of virtuous actions are embedded. Just as matter and energy are indestructible, so are these karmas. They are real and valuable assets which prevent the karma yogi from doing wrong actions and goad him to do selfless actions. They push him on towards the goal. The path of karma yoga, which eventually leads to the attainment of the infinite bliss of the highest self, can never be futile.

How can an aspirant live the ideal of karma yoga in day-to-day life?

Swami Niranjanananda: Karma yoga should be done with a definite purpose to help bring about a transformation in attitude, behaviour and expression. Karma yoga helps to enhance the ability of the hands, the expression, creativity, coordination and cooperation between the different areas of life. Any action which is performed with clarity of mind and proper emotional balance is karma yoga.

People perform actions day in and day out. The body, mind and personality perform actions all the time. Most of these actions are known as *sakama karma*, for the fulfilment of a desire. *Sakama* has the seed of desire and involves those actions performed for self-satisfaction, sensual and mental satisfaction. Ninety-nine point nine percent of actions fall into this category. Karma yoga belongs to the category of *nishkama karma*, selfless actions.

For a person who is involved in the work of an organization, working to support the family and to earn enough money to live happily, *nishkama karma* should be the attitude and approach, as it gives birth to a different form of realization and understanding of the *vruttis* or modifications of the mind.

There are two kinds of *vrutti*, pleasant and unpleasant, and they deal with the daily experiences of life. *Klishta*, painful or difficult, and *aklishta*, pleasant, are the *vruttis* which control and govern every thought, action, desire and motivation. It is important to understand them, realize which pattern of the mind is conducive to the development of one's creative abilities and faculties or which *vruttis* have to be worked upon and transformed.

What is the best way to approach karma yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Although this question has been answered in the *Bhagavad Gita*, karma yoga is a misused and misunderstood term. Everyone defines karma yoga as the way they wish to live and experience. Some people have the idea

that karma yoga is physical work, others understand it to be selfless work, or doing unpleasant work with a cool attitude.

Karma yoga works at an attitudinal level. It aims to change the perception, to change selfish activity into selfless activity, to lead one from being self-oriented to universally orientated, and to change the attitudes so that instead of being self-centred, one extends outwards.

This attitude needs to be applied logically and in action. For example, while washing clothes, cooking food, cleaning the house one should not say, "This takes away my time, I should have some help." These thoughts mean that one is putting oneself above the activity and above others. Karma yoga is a connection with activity, not going above the activity. Once one puts oneself above the activity, the ego says, "Oh, why should I do that? Others can do it!" Why should that thought come? Why does one have to depend on others to do the work?

By nature karmas are selfish, but when the word yoga is added to karma, it changes the quality from selfish to selfless. The purpose of karma yoga is to stop the movement coming inwards to the centre of oneself, instead, the movement is extended outwards from one's centre.

What is the significance of karma yoga for personal evolution?

Swami Satyananda: Each individual comes to the ashram with the accumulated treasure of his past actions and remains engrossed in this world as long as these treasures are not exhausted. After the harvest is reaped and inward awareness dawns, he treads the path of God.

In spiritual life, karma yoga is not just social service or a pastime, but the means to liberation from karma. However, the individual fails to see beyond the inner curtains and only sees the body. Therefore, he experiences pain, pleasure and displeasure in relation to the existence of the body. Birth, death, prestige and insult are felt. When one curtain is removed, thoughts, emotions and intuitions are seen. When a

further curtain is removed, the vision is widened and he sees not through the external eyes but through the divine eye.

That curtain is called karma. It is not connected with the senses and has no connection with the outside life. It has come along with each person, whether he knows it or not. In the present life more and more is added to this karma and it becomes one's destiny, which causes happiness or sorrow and is responsible for one's upliftment or downfall.

If a person does raja yoga or kundalini yoga sadhana without eliminating his samskaras or desires, he will achieve only a certain stage. His progress will be obstructed due to a sankalpa which remains in the mind based on those samskaras and desires. That sankalpa is the centre of gravity of his life. He makes progress with his resolve, but as a result of that sankalpa he will have to come back.

In karma yoga a person involves himself in work without ego or personal sankalpa, and the curtain is removed. He sees God in all; everybody is his God. He serves God through everybody. He develops unselfishness and generosity. Greed and passion diminish and he becomes a completely different person. Many times Swami Sivananda did not have money in the ashram. However, if anyone came to him in winter for a blanket, he used to send the swamis to the market to purchase the blanket on credit, and give it to the poor person. He would say, "This poor man is God." That was his attitude.

Karma yoga opens the heart, for it develops an attitude of reverence and respect towards every living being. Karma yogis become absolutely human. Apart from the inner joy that it creates in one's self and the freedom that one feels in the practice of karma yoga, the most important aspect is that karma yoga gives one an opportunity of expression without creating a result. Just as a mirror is cleaned in order to see one's beauty, one should purify the inner vision and see one's real spirit. Through karma yoga one can purify oneself, discipline the senses, mind and emotions, and thereby discover the real purpose of life.

What is the link between karma yoga and spiritual life?

Swami Satyananda: Selfless action in itself is yoga. If a person has understood yoga and spiritual life to be sitting in the lotus posture with eyes closed, he has misunderstood yoga and spiritual life. If a person thinks that the activities of life do not contribute to the growth of spiritual consciousness, he is making a great blunder! People cannot evolve or overcome their faults without action. If karma is renounced, the mind will not find a basis for evolution.

It is important that the mind be prepared and the personality rendered ready. Samskaras, positive or negative, must be exhausted, awareness must be extended to every level, dedication or consecration must be perfected, attachments, illusions and infatuations must be spotted, scrutinized and analyzed. This is not possible without doing karma yoga. By doing karma yoga everyone is able to cover a great distance in spiritual life.

Everyone who is practising yoga should transform his daily activities through the philosophy of karma yoga. The purpose of one's daily work should become spiritual; or rather one should realize nature's spiritual purpose behind one's karma.

WHO IS A KARMA YOGI

What is your advice to a karma yogi?

Swami Satyananda: Do you enjoy a happy, harmonious home life? Are you afire with enthusiasm in your day-to-day activities? When adverse circumstances squash and suppress you, do you rise above them with a cool head and easy assurance? If so, you are a yogi. Strive and put your house in order. Strive for the betterment of society. Strive with every fibre of your being for the welfare of humanity.

How can a karma yogi be described?

Swami Satyananda: In *Yoga Vasishtha* (6:2:201:22) Sri Rama says to the court:

*Na tushyaami na hrishyaami na pushyaami na rodimi;
Kaaryam kaaryam karomyeko bhraantirdooram gataa mama.*

I am neither content nor discontent with anything, nor do I rejoice or repine at any event. I do what is my duty in society without retaining the erroneous conception of reaping the reward.

Similarly, the karma yogi may run a business, hospital, school, university or poultry farm. He is not a stupid person with an animal consciousness in his dealings. He is a wise person with a developed consciousness, yet still restless and disturbed. Every now and then his judgements are incorrect and the mind, full of complexes and mental errors, is not at peace. Calamities and disturbances come and go; nobody can help it. Birth and death, positive and negative, everything continues in his life, but he looks upon them with the attitude of a witness. Sometimes he experiences joy and pain due to financial or family affairs, but he is not affected.

He looks upon the affairs as a witness, whether in his life or in the lives of others. Death in his family is just a simple event for which he does not lament. At the same time, if any great success comes to him, supposing he may become a prime minister or a president, he still remains unaffected. He knows that this is nothing. Although he remains active in the world, he looks upon life with an attitude of indifference.

The concept of a spiritual person in the *Bhagavad Gita* is one who is working, thinking and living in the world, but does not become attached to the happenings and affectations of life. This state of release or detachment from life is perfection, and is called *moksha*.

What are some of the qualities of a karma yogi?

Swami Sivananda: A karma yogi must be able to feel others in order to serve. He must open his heart in order to know and understand the suffering of others and be ever ready to serve them. He must come out of the centre of the egoistic narrow circle and develop a broader vision. He must develop

atmabhava, feeling unity with all. He must be helpful, not by fits and starts, but all the time throughout his life. He must forget himself entirely and be without the least tinge of pride and irritability. He should try to remove any trace of passion, greed, anger, egoism, jealousy and harshness.

He should not expect any kind of fruits for his actions nor have any desire for name and fame, appreciation, admiration and gratitude. He must have a spotless character and be always humble. A karma yogi should always speak sweet words and be absolutely fearless. A timid person is unfit for karma yoga.

He should have an amiable, loving, sociable nature and be able to mix with everybody without distinction of caste, creed or colour. With perfect adaptability, mercy and cosmic love he is sympathetic and tolerant. He should have a cool and balanced mind, lead a simple life and rejoice in the welfare of others. In the words of the *Bhagavad Gita* (12:4):

*Sanniyamyendriyagramam sarvatra samabuddhayah;
Te praapnuvanti maameva sarvabhootahite rataah.*

Having restrained and subdued the senses, regarding everything equally, rejoicing in the welfare of all, verily they come to Me.

A karma yogi should have a sound, healthy and strong physical body. He should take great care of the body, but should not have the least attachment for it. He should be ever ready to sacrifice his body for a noble cause. He should do asana, pranayama and physical exercise regularly and take good and nourishing food. If he lives with a guru, he should be prepared to do any work assigned to him willingly. If he creates interest in work which the mind revolts against, he will develop willpower and later be able to do any kind of work.

The body is part of the universe and so is the mind. What is called world is only the mind. The mind of each person is affected by the thoughts and opinions of others; there is pressure of thought from outside. The karma yogi should

have immense strength to act against these outside thoughts. He should have courage, patience and perseverance. He should stick to his work with determination, leech-like tenacity, adamant will and asinine patience, even if he fails twenty times.

A karma yogi should bear insult, disrespect, dishonour, harsh words, censure, disgrace, heat and cold, pleasure, pain and disease. He should have absolute faith in himself, God, the scriptures and the words of the guru. Only such a person can become a good karma yogi and do useful service to the country and humanity. The practice of karma yoga does not require enormous wealth as one can serve with the mind and body.

A karma yogi knows the secret of work. If he serves people with humility and feeling, he will be honoured and respected by all, for there is a hidden power in selfless service.

Is it necessary to possess these qualities before practising karma yoga?

Swami Sivananda: The ideal *adhikari*, qualified person, is difficult to find. If a karma yogi possesses a few of the above qualifications, the others will come by themselves when he works earnestly in the field of karma yoga. The practitioner need not be discouraged, but forget the body and plunge into the service of God. He should march boldly with *prem* and *shraddha*, love and faith, and start the work with a little capital of love, mercy and sympathy. Fearlessness, humility and other virtues will shine in the true karma yogi. He is never in want of anything, for even in an unknown place people give him what he needs and nature is ever ready to serve him.

Who is a true karma yogi?

Swami Satyananda: The great yogis, saints and sages were karma yogis, due to actions performed perfectly without the slightest hint of egoism. It is not necessary to do large amounts of work, but the attitude and state of awareness

are important. A hermit in his cave can be a karma yogi, although he does little work. There are many people like Swami Vivekananda and Swami Sivananda who epitomized the essence of karma yoga and showed that karma yoga is not just an ideal, but a possibility. Many karma yogis, both famous and unknown, have expressed total egolessness in their interactions with the world, perfect expressions and responses to given circumstances.

What they could do, others can also achieve. To live by the law of karma is an uphill task, but surely not impossible. The path and the possibility are open to everyone. Each person can develop a powerful and one-pointed mind, awaken his intuitive faculties and become a karma yogi. Only the desire to attain perfection, along with relentless and continuous practice is required.

The karma yogi goes through small day-to-day events. His test lies in applying the attitude of karma yoga to daily problems, whether thorny, complicated or ordinary. The person who can detach himself from the excitement of joyful events and the maddening pain of sorrowful events is a karma yogi in the true sense of the word, for he has offered all he has. Swami Vivekananda said, “When a person has reached the state of readiness to sacrifice the mind, body and everything for another being, he has attained the perfection of karma yoga.” For such a person prayer does not mean remembrance for a few routine minutes but the offering of his life to God. Life itself becomes a constant prayer by dedicating himself to karma yoga.

How should a realized being live in the world?

Swami Sivananda: The wise should set an example for the masses by working for the upliftment of the world. King Janaka aimed at moksha by doing selfless and disinterested work. People are creatures of imitation and they try to follow the example of their superiors. The common masses go by the standards of right and wrong set up by the conduct of great individuals. The wise should glorify action

and make them attractive, and never disturb ignorant people of petty understanding. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita* (3:21–23, 3:25–26):

*Yadyadaacharati shreshthastattadevetaro janah;
Sa yatpramaanam kurute lokastadanuvartate.*

*Na me paarthaaasti kartavyam trishu lokeshu kinchana;
Naanavaaptamavaaptavyam varta eva cha karmani.*

*Yadi hyaham na varteyam jaatu karmanyatandritah;
Mama vartmaanuvartante manushyaah paartha sarvashah.*

*Saktaah karmanyavidvaamso yathaa kurvanti bhaarata;
Kuryaadvidvaamstathaasaktashchikeershurlokasangraham.*

*Na buddhibhedam janayedajnaanaam karmasanginaam;
Joshayetsarvakarmaani vidvaanyuktah samaacharan.*

Whatsoever a great man does, that other men also do; whatever he sets up as the standard, that the world follows. (21)

There is nothing in the three worlds, O Arjuna, that should be done by Me, nor is there anything unattained that should be attained; yet I engage Myself in action! (22)

For, should I not ever engage Myself in action, unwearied, men would in every way follow My path, O Arjuna! (23)

As the ignorant act from attachment to action, O Bharata (Arjuna), so should the wise act without attachment, wishing the welfare of the world. (25)

Let no wise person unsettle the minds of ignorant people, who are attached to action; he should engage them in all actions, himself fulfilling them with devotion. (26)

Should the karma yogi be knowledgeable?

Swami Sivananda: A karma yogi should have an elemental knowledge of raja yoga, psychology, ayurveda, physiology, family medicine, hygiene, Samkhya and Vedanta. If he has

knowledge of the laws of the mind and its nature, habits and ways, he will be in a position to always keep a healthy and calm mind. According to the theory of ayurveda, raja yoga and western psychology, no one can work smoothly with a ruffled mind, which disturbs the three humours of the body and brings diseases in turn.

A karma yogi should have an understanding of the laws of the universe. An elementary knowledge of astrology is of immense value. The planets have an influence on the mind and body and exercise a benign or malignant influence in accordance with their position. With some knowledge of astrology, the evil effects of unfavourable planets can be warded off.

Why is vigilance important for a karma yogi?

Swami Sivananda: A karma yogi should give now, not tomorrow or the day after, as the person may go away and the opportunity of rendering service be gone. This is one of the most important rules in selfless service. Opportunities come and go, therefore, a karma yogi should be ever vigilant and use every occasion for seva. When a task is put off for the next day, other tasks accumulate and the moment for service is lost. A karma yogi should never miss a single opportunity, but watch for and create opportunities to serve. He thus becomes a veritable God on earth and a blessing to the world.

Who is a well-known example of a great karma yogi?

Swami Satyananda: Probably the most well-known example in the twentieth century is Mahatma Gandhi. He could do great amounts of work because he was not influenced by personal likes and dislikes, whims and fancies. His mind was free of the limitations that interfere with the actions of most people, so he was able to view his work to alleviate the problems of India as duty, with pristine clarity. Most decisions in the world are clouded by personal friendships and enmities. Gandhi was able to overcome this one-sidedness and obtain strength.

All people were his friends, even his so-called enemies. None of his actions were done as a favour. He acted because something needed to be done and the situation demanded it. He acted for the benefit of the people of India. It is said that he was stubborn, but he knew his mind and understood the minds of others in a clear, undistorted light. He was a politician with a strong mind, yet he showed deep and sincere compassion for all. By vocation he was a politician and by aspiration he was a great karma yogi.

Mahatma Gandhi achieved his success by purifying his mind through continuous effort and karma yoga. He never seemed to tire of work, unlike other people who do an hour of work and then lose interest or become fatigued. Gandhi was able to clean his mind through relentless practice of karma yoga, backed up by other forms of yoga, including bhakti and kriya yoga. A calm mind can do intense work for long periods without fatigue and is not diverted by external distractions or inner disturbances.

Most people waste their energy on petty, egotistical arguments or heated discussions about nothing. Their mental and physical energies are dissipated and little or no power goes towards their work. Gandhi clearly illustrated that the combination of concentrated power and detachment becomes irresistible and moves mountains. Detachment here does not mean disdain for the world. Although Gandhi was detached, his actions always expressed compassion.

A karma yogi does the best he can, but at the same time, he does not allow external events to unbalance the mind. This attitude can be slowly developed and applied through the practice of karma yoga, as was done by Mahatma Gandhi. He saw that every action he did or did not do was part of the divine process of the universe in accordance with the will of the cosmic consciousness. He was only an instrument and a mere witness of his actions.

How does a karma yogi differ from an ordinary person?

Swami Sivananda: A worldly person works with the idea that ‘I am the doer’, with expectation of fruits, and thinks that this world is a solid reality. A trained karma yogi, however, works for the upliftment of humanity, with the attitude of a non-doer and *sakshi bhava*, the attitude of a witness. He works with the strong *nishchaya*, determination, that the world is unreal and nothing but Brahman. His *jnana agni*, fire of wisdom, burns the fruits of action and destroys bondage.

How do liberated people serve humanity?

Swami Satyananda: The living saints of every time and nation have served the cause of humanity efficiently. Lord Buddha revived the conditions of India. Not only did he establish a great new religion, but his revolt against Hindu hedonism, asceticism, extreme spiritualism, and the caste system deeply influenced Hinduism itself. Adi Shankaracharya changed the integral structure of India. Tulsidas was marvellously successful in bringing about a thorough revolution in the aspirations and expressions of the Indian people. He discouraged the malpractice of siddhis and undoubtedly eliminated the faces of ghosts, devils and evil forces from the masses. Ramakrishna Paramahansa prepared India to fight for her real cause.

It is everyone’s duty to acknowledge these champions of the human cause. They are pure at heart and intensely courageous in action, serve the fallen, and are meditative before taking up any work. Those who work ceaselessly and selflessly for a mission and are still humble and sincere can easily be called the wonders of this strange world. These well-trained and developed minds can surely work wonders in the dissemination of spiritual teaching.

Why is Sri Rama still a hero and idol?

Swami Niranjanananda: Sage Vasishtha gave the following advice to Sri Rama, “Attain your completeness in yoga, know everything to be impermanent. Know how to separate the wrong from the right, the appropriate from the inappropriate,

the bad from the good, the positive from the negative, the rational from the irrational, and identify with sattwa. Once you are established in the path of yoga, again engage yourself in the world, do not isolate yourself from the world.” Sri Rama said, “Guruji, I have understood what you are trying to tell me, and I will make that effort.”

In the course of his life, Sri Rama made the effort and attained perfect equilibrium. He faced many crises and difficulties in his life; however, he maintained his equipoise, clarity and focus at all times. It is due to this attainment of yoga in his life, and the great understanding shown in his interaction with society, that he is still recognized as ‘maryada purushottam’. *Purusha* means person, *uttam* means the best. Therefore, *purushottam* means the best kind of individual, the best kind of person, who is an example to emulate. When maryada is added before purushottam, it means a person who knows the boundaries of appropriateness and never crosses them to create any discord within himself or in anyone’s life.

The application of the teachings of Sage Vasishtha made Sri Rama an idol and a hero. He continues to be the inspiration for all people in the Indian subcontinent and beyond. Not because he is God, not because he is considered to be an *avatara*, an incarnation of God, but because he became the perfect human being. This is the message of *Yoga Vasishtha*. Perfection may not be developed in one day, but one must remember that the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. Whoever takes that first step is the achiever and winner.

ONE WORLD ONLY

What do you wish for everyone?

Swami Sivananda: May you attain purity of heart through constant selfless service. May you radiate joy, peace and bliss everywhere. May you rejoice in the welfare of all beings. May the minds of all be fixed in God while the hands are in the service of humanity. May you understand the principles and

techniques of seva. May your actions become offerings to the Lord. May you attain moksha through the practice of karma yoga in this birth.

How is karma yoga the expression of other yogas?

Swami Niranjanananda: The first scripture on karma yoga was written about five thousand years ago, predating Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* and books written on hatha yoga or raja yoga by other seers and sages. Karma yoga was seen as the expression of life.

To hear a channel on the radio, one has to tune in to that channel. Tuning in to the channel and being a proper receptor for the frequency is the process of karma yoga. Sadhana is the first part of yoga, when one goes through the process of becoming; but when one has become, the journey does not stop. As long as the flower is contained in the bud, it is going through the process of transformation and growth, nourishing itself. It develops the latent qualities and faculties which eventually become the petals, colours, smell and form. When the flower leaves the bud and comes out in its full glorious colours and fragrance, it ceases to live for itself, but lives for others.

If self-realization or samadhi is the goal of yoga, the practitioner nourishes himself in sadhana like the bud nourishes itself before flowering. Upon the completion of a successful sadhana, when a breakthrough has taken place, the colours, petals and smell come out and beautify the environment and atmosphere. This is the second stage when life flowers to please others.

Just as there are two stages in the life of a flower, so it is in the life of every individual. One can discover the inherent potentials through the practices of raja yoga, hatha yoga, kriya yoga, nada yoga, laya yoga, but eventually a breakthrough has to take place. The breakthrough means attainment of vision, and the new perspective relates to the betterment of one's life and the betterment of the environment in which one lives.

This beautiful and harmonious external participation becomes the natural expression in the life of a person who has attained yoga. The last expression of the qualities developed by yoga is karma yoga. It is the vehicle by which all other yogas are expressed.

Why is a balance between involvement and meditation necessary?

Swami Satyananda: Many spiritual aspirants are faced with the dilemma of whether to live in the world of action or to practise meditation only. Some believe that evolution is possible through meditation alone. Others maintain that karma yoga is the ultimate yoga, which evolves the soul and helps one to reach the highest.

It is necessary to live in the external as well as the internal world, as one without the other leads away from the path of higher knowledge to delusion. Karma and meditation are both necessary and go together. There should be a happy blending or a synthesis of the two paths. A compromise between extroversion and introversion is necessary in life. The inner experience must be supplemented and expressed with outer actions. There must be a balance between introspection and worldly interest and activity.

Many spiritual aspirants, whether renunciates or householders, go deep within during meditation. Sometimes they lose body awareness, yet they are not able to accomplish anything in life. Their memory power is poor, and they lack understanding and steady awareness. This happens when their external and spiritual life have become two different lives. In order to correct this, the practices of hatha, bhakti, jnana, and especially karma yoga should be integrated along with the practice of meditation.

There must be acceptance, integration and understanding of both the inner and outer environments. It is essential that each spiritual aspirant should practise introverting techniques, such as raja yoga, kriya yoga and pranayama, combined with and supplemented by methods of

harmonizing the interaction with the external surroundings through karma yoga. In this way the aspirant can effectively balance inner and outer life. He can tread the spiritual path, knowing the complete oneness of everything that exists, both internally and externally. Swami Sivananda urged everyone to work in both the outer and inner world. Spiritual life does not mean sitting in the lotus posture all day and meditating. Karma yoga is an essential part of spiritual life.

How can the sense of separateness be removed?

Swami Sivananda: Selfless service destroys the idea that one is separate from others. As selfishness is rooted out one develops a broad and liberal outlook in life and begins to feel oneness and unity. Finally, knowledge of God is obtained, and one realizes that He alone dwells in the hearts of all beings. Great peace, bliss and joy are experienced.

The practice of karma yoga generates the feeling that the whole world is one family – the family of God. Love floods all hearts. The narrow and mean outlook which makes one feel separate from others is a strong fetter. This limited vision must be killed by feeling one with the whole of humanity and all creation. One must love and serve all, be tolerant and generous, and see the Lord in His creation. This is the way to remove the sense of separateness.

What is the culmination of evolution according to the Bhagavad Gita?

Swami Satyananda: The eighteen chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita* are the stages of yogic evolution in the path of a sincere aspirant. This great pilgrimage starts from the point of dejection, frustration and depression, and ends at the final stage of human evolution. The last chapter is called ‘Moksha Karma Sannyasa Yoga’, renunciation of action and liberation. *Moksha* means complete freedom, where one is no longer controlled by the mind, a captive of the senses and obliged to passions. *Sannyasa* means dedication, the last yoga. For spiritual aspirants this stage is the liberation from

karma, the renunciation of everything, where the mind is absolutely free from attachment as well as detachment, and the consciousness is free from all kinds of pain. When the individual is free and has dedicated his karma, it is called moksha karma sannyasa yoga. It is said in the last chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* (18:49):

*Asaktabuddhih sarvatra jitaatmaa vigatasprihah;
Naishkarmyasiddhim paramaam sannyaasenaadhigachchhati.*

He whose intellect is unattached everywhere, who has subdued his self, and from whom desire has fled, attains the supreme state of freedom from action by renunciation.

Liberation is not salvation, mukti or nirvana, as is commonly understood. It is a stage which one experiences within this life and for this life. The person who has attained liberation through renunciation does not leave the body and enter heaven. He does not become a superman and walk on air, fire or water, and he does not give up his job, money and family to live in the jungle. After achieving higher spiritual consciousness he still operates in the realm of prakriti, maya or duality. Many saints, sages, prophets and avatars have moved, lived and acted in the world while being totally identified with the higher spirit.

What is the aim of yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: A practitioner needs to remember that the aim of yoga is service; it is not God-realization or self-realization. His normal belief is that the more he meditates, the quicker he will experience self-realization. This is the biggest misconception that can ever exist in his mind. The aim of yoga is not to be separate from other human beings and life.

When the aspirant separates himself from being fully involved in the world, from constructively helping the world, God definitely moves further away from him. If he

thinks that by living in isolation and practising meditation for twelve hours, he will quickly realize his highest self, God will only say, "This person is just thinking of himself and not bothered about other people who are suffering, so why should I bother about him?" When God knows that a person cares for other people as well as for himself, that he has the same feeling towards others as he has towards his own people, He will say, "Oh, this person is working so hard, let me help him." Then God comes either physically, as a vision or an inspiration.

The culmination of yoga is when the practitioner has a universal vision, not an isolated and self-centred vision. He has to adopt this approach in relation to today's world and environment. Once upon a time isolation may have been necessary when each individual's mentality, aspirations, social structure and environment were different and everything was conducive to that form of experience. However, out of the millions who practised, how many have actually had some experience?

The problem is that the practitioner has put himself first. The cart has been put before the horse. The horse is God and the practitioner is the cart. If he keeps the horse in front and the cart behind, the horse can pull the cart. It can only happen when he develops the attitude of seva, along with the practices of meditation, yoga and sadhana.

Seva is not service or doing a good deed. Seva is both a quality and a science. It is a science because awareness needs to be developed. In order to become a perfect sevak, it is necessary to eliminate selfish qualities and not to follow the whims of the ego or the tendencies of the mind. Therefore, one needs to practise sadhana, yoga and meditation, but the ultimate aim is to be a sevak. When one becomes a sevak, the horse is put before the cart and so the horse can move the cart.

Swami Vivekananda described karma yoga as 'the attainment of God through work'. There is no use in trying to perfect any sadhana without first contributing to the

upliftment of humanity. The more a sevak serves humanity, the more the divine energy flows through him.

What is the importance of seva and karma yoga for humanity?

Swami Niranjanananda: The scriptures say that in *Kali Yuga*, the present era, there are only two ways to attain God, karma and bhakti yoga. In this age an aspirant cannot do sadhana and manifest a new creation and heaven, as did Sage Vishwamitra. He cannot relate to divine beings by only doing japa and meditation. The need of this age is to have the attitude of seva, and let compassion, affection, love and devotion flow spontaneously. If this happens and continues to happen, seva will one day become the new dharma. Going to temples and having darshan of divine beings is not real darshan; the actual darshan lies within humankind itself.

An individual tries to illumine himself and fight the darkness that is spreading in society and the world. This darkness is not only ignorance but also the emotions of humankind. In this progression there is only one way to give light, and that is seva. It is said in the Bible (Isaiah 58:10):

If you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.

What is the importance of experiencing karma yoga?

Swami Satyananda: The mystery of karma yoga will never be unravelled by logical speculation. Karma yoga is impossible to really understand without experience. However, even one minute or one second of experiencing the bliss and perfection of real karma yoga gives the full understanding of what has been inadequately explained. No more questions or contradictions occur, for one knows. Until this profound experience, one must merely read carefully what has been

written, think about it and try to put it into practice, no matter how superficially or inadequately. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (3:31) Sri Krishna says of karma yoga:

*Ye me matamidam nityamanutishthanti maanavaah;
Shraddhaavanto'nasooyanto muchyante te'pi karmabhih.*

Those men who constantly practise this teaching of Mine with faith and without cavilling, they too are freed from actions.

The precepts of karma yoga may seem almost trite, but their implications are overwhelming and, if practised, launch one into the realms of higher awareness. Karma yoga should be practised to the best of one's ability so that its real meaning is known. The bonds of karma carry forward from lifetime to lifetime and need to be exhausted. How does one exhaust them, if not by leaps and bounds? However, there is delay and the discharge of karmas is postponed until tomorrow.

What do you wish for the world?

Swami Satyananda: It is more important than ever that people understand the concept of inactive activity, selfless service, karma yoga. The day this is understood and accepted, the human race will become karma yogis.

My desire is that the message of karma yoga, jnana yoga and bhakti yoga, as taught in the *Bhagavad Gita*, may reach the people of the world. The *Bhagavad Gita* is printed, published and sold by the millions. However, I do not consider that people are delivered and begin to prosper until the message of the *Bhagavad Gita* becomes part of their lives, inspiring their behaviour and actions.

My sincere desire is that the world should be full of karma yogis. Children should grow up with the example of karma yoga. Everyone should rise above selfishness and, in rising, achieve the path of worldly good as well as the supreme path of deliverance.

Success in human life depends on the attainment of self-knowledge. After the achievement of that experience, there is no desire. It is a different level, which is not a state of void, but absolute fulfilment. It is difficult to attain that state; it is time and labour consuming. This state cannot be attained without the grace of guru and God. Karma yoga is the first step to achieve this state.

I view the whole of life as being a process of creation and alchemy, where 'I' is a part of the metal which has to be, and will be, hammered and purified. To unfold the self is the purpose of life and through this the karma yogi reaches his freedom.



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ADI SHANKARACHARYA

4. Work is Worship

You are my atma. Parvati is buddhi. The pranas are Your attendants; this body is Your house. The action of sensual enjoyment is worship of You. Deep sleep is the establishment of samadhi. Walking is the perambulation around You. All my speeches are Your praise. Whatever actions I perform are all worship of You, O Shambhu! 140

BHAGAVAD GITA

1. Detachment

- (18:1) I desire to know severally, O mighty-armed, the essence or truth of renunciation, O Hrishikesha, as also of abandonment, O slayer of Keshi! 13
- (18:2) The sages understand sannyasa to be the renunciation of action with desire; the wise declare the abandonment of the fruits of all actions as tyaga. 13
- (18:5) Acts of sacrifice, gift and austerity should not be abandoned, but performed; sacrifice, gift and also austerity are the purifiers of the wise. 14
- (18:6) But even these actions should be performed leaving aside attachment and the desire for rewards, O Arjuna! This is My certain and best conviction. 14
- (18:9) Whatever obligatory action is done, O Arjuna, merely because it ought to be done, abandoning attachment and also the desire for reward, that renunciation is regarded as sattwic. 14
- (18:10) The man of renunciation, pervaded by purity, intelligent and with his doubts cut asunder, does not hate a disagreeable work, nor is he attached to an agreeable one. 15
- (18:11) Verily, it is not possible for an embodied being to abandon actions entirely; but he who relinquishes the rewards of actions is verily called a man of renunciation. 15
- (18:12) The threefold fruit of action: evil, good and mixed, accrues after death to the non-abandoners, but never to the abandoners. 15

(5:10) He who performs actions, offering them to Brahman and abandoning attachment, is not tainted by sin as a lotus leaf is untainted by water.	17
(3:19) Therefore, always perform action which should be done without attachment, for by performing action without attachment man reaches the Supreme.	28
(3:25) As the ignorant men act from attachment to action, O Arjuna, so should the wise act without attachment, wishing the welfare of the world.	29
(3:35) Better is one's own duty, though devoid of merit than the duty of another well discharged. Better is death in one's own duty; the duty of another is fraught with fear.	36
(18:45) Each man, devoted to his own duty, attains perfection. How he attains perfection while being engaged in his own duty, hear now.	37
(18:47) Better is one's own duty (though) destitute of merits, than the duty of another well performed. He who does the duty ordained by his own nature incurs no sin.	37
(18:48) One should not abandon, O Arjuna, the duty to which one is born, though faulty; for, all undertakings are enveloped by evil, as fire by smoke!	37
(3:8) Perform the duty you are bound to, for action is superior to inaction.	40
(3:6) He of deluded understanding, restraining the organs of action, sits thinking of the sense objects in the mind, is called a hypocrite.	42
(18:7) Verily, the renunciation of obligatory action is improper; abandoning the same from delusion is declared to be tamasic.	46
(18:8) He who abandons action on account of the fear of bodily trouble does not obtain the merit of renunciation by doing such rajasic renunciation.	46

2. Two Qualities

(2:50) Endowed with wisdom, evenness of mind, one casts off in this life both good and evil deeds; therefore, devote yourself to yoga; yoga is skill in actions.	50
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(13:9) Non-attachment, non-identification of the Self with son, wife, home and the rest, and constant even-mindedness in the attainment of the desirable and the undesirable is knowledge. 62

(2:48) Perform action, O Arjuna, being steadfast in yoga, abandoning attachment and balanced in success and failure! Evenness of mind is called yoga. 63

(2:38) Having made pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat the same, engage in battle for the sake of battle; thus you shall not incur sin. 63

(4:22) Content with what comes to him without effort, free from the pairs of opposites and envy, even-minded in success and failure, though acting, the yogi is not bound. 63

(2:56) He whose mind is not shaken by adversity, who does not hanker after pleasures, and who is free from attachment, fear and anger, is called a sage of steady wisdom. 66

(2:57) He who is everywhere without attachment, on meeting with anything good or bad, who neither rejoices nor hates, his wisdom is fixed. 66

3. Seva

(2:40) In this there is no loss of effort; nor is there any harm. Even a little practice of this service protects one from great fear. 85

(12:10) If you are unable to practise even this abhyasa yoga, be intent on doing actions for My sake; even by doing actions for My sake, you shall attain perfection. 86

(3:9) The world is bound by actions other than those performed for the sake of sacrifice. Therefore, O son of Kunti, perform action for that sake, for sacrifice alone, free from attachment! 97

(18:61) The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, causing all beings, by His illusive power, to revolve as if mounted on a machine. 109

4. Work is Worship

(18:78) Wherever is Krishna, the Lord of Yoga, wherever is Arjuna, the wielder of the bow, there are prosperity, happiness, victory and firm policy; such is my conviction. 123

(16:15) "I am rich and born in a noble family. Who else is equal to me? I will sacrifice; I will give; I will rejoice." Thinking thus, deluded by ignorance, 124

(16:16) Bewildered by many a fancy, entangled in the snare of delusion, and addicted to the gratification of lust, they fall into a foul hell. 124

(18:68) He who with supreme devotion to Me will teach this supreme secret to My devotees, shall doubtless come to Me. 133

(18:69) Nor is there any among men who does dearer service to Me, nor shall there be another on earth dearer to Me than he. 133

(18:57) Mentally renouncing all actions in Me, having Me as the highest goal, resorting to the yoga of discrimination always fix your mind on Me. 138

(4:23) To one who is devoid of attachment, who is liberated, whose mind is established in knowledge, who works for the sake of sacrifice, for the sake of God, the whole action is dissolved. 138

(18:46) By worshipping Him from whom all beings have evolved and by whom all this is pervaded, through his own duty, man attains perfection. 139

(9:27) Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give, whatever you practise as austerity, O Arjuna, do it as an offering unto Me! 140

(11:55) He who does all actions for Me, who looks upon Me as the Supreme, who is devoted to Me, who is free from attachment, who bears enmity towards no creature, he comes to Me, O Arjuna! 140

(4:24) Brahman is the oblation; Brahman is the ghee; by Brahman is the oblation poured into the fire of Brahman; Brahman verily shall be reached by him who always sees Brahman in action. 142

5. The Gift of Life

(4:37) As the blazing fire reduces fuel to ashes, O Arjuna,
so does the fire of knowledge reduce all actions to ashes! 146

(12:4) Having restrained and subdued the senses, regarding
everything equally, rejoicing in the welfare of all, verily they
come to Me. 155

(3:21) Whatsoever a great man does, that other men also
do; whatever he sets up as the standard that the world
follows. 158

(3:22) There is nothing in the three worlds, O Arjuna, that
should be done by Me, nor is there anything unattained
that should be attained; yet I engage Myself in action! 158

(3:23) For, should I not ever engage Myself in action,
unwearied, men would in every way follow My path, O
Arjuna! 158

(3:25) As the ignorant men act from attachment to action, O
Bharata (Arjuna), so should the wise act without attachment,
wishing the welfare of the world. 158

(3:26) Let no wise person unsettle the minds of ignorant
people, who are attached to action; he should engage them
in all actions, himself fulfilling them with devotion. 158

(18:49) He whose intellect is unattached everywhere, who
has subdued his self, and from whom desire has fled, attains
the supreme state of freedom from action by renunciation. 166

(3:31) Those men who constantly practise this teaching of
Mine with faith and without cavilling, they too are freed
from actions. 169

HOLY BIBLE

3. Seva

New Testament (Luke 18:22–25) For it is easier for a camel
to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to
enter the kingdom of God. 95

New Testament (Matthew 22:37) Love the Lord your God
with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your
mind. 100

New Testament (Matthew 22:38) This is the great and first commandment.	100
New Testament (Matthew 22:39) And the second is like this: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.	100
New Testament (Matthew 22:40) On these two commandments depend all the laws and the prophets.	100
New Testament (Matthew 25:35) I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you invited me in;	106
New Testament (Matthew 25:36): I needed clothes and you clothed me; I was sick and you looked after me; I was in prison and you came to visit me.	107
New Testament (Matthew 25:40): Whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.	107

4. Work is Worship

Old Testament (Proverbs 14:31): If you give to the poor, your needs will be supplied.	126
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5. The Gift of Life

New Testament (John 15:1–2): I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.	148
Old Testament (Isaiah 58:10): If you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.	168

YOGA SUTRAS OF SAGE PATANJALI

2. Two Qualities

(1:1) Now, therefore, complete instructions regarding yoga.	66
(1:2) To block the patterns of consciousness is yoga.	67

YOGA VASISHTHA OF SAGE VASISHTHA

1. Detachment

(5:6:11) The defects of the dutiful and their pain and pleasure are all lost in their duty, as the darkness of night is dispelled by the light of day, and the clouds of the rainy season are dispersed in autumn. 37

(5:17:2) The desire of doing one's duties without expectation of their reward is also called the living liberation, and the doers of their respective duties are said to be the living liberated. 41

(5:17:3) The dependence of beings on their desires, and their strong attachment to external objects, is called their bondage to this world by the teachers. 41

(5:17:4) But the desire of conducting one's self according to the course of events, without any expectation of fruition, constitutes jivanmukti. 41

(5:17:5) The desire to enjoy external objects, is truly the bondage of the soul; indifference to worldly enjoyments constitutes freedom in life. 41

(5:17:6) Want of greediness and anxiety prior to and on account of some gain, and absence of mirth and change in one's disposition afterwards; is the true freedom of men. 41

(3:88:11) Do your duty as it may present itself to you, rather than remaining inactive doing nothing. The dull person is like a dirty mirror, which does not reflect the image, and comes to no use at all. 43

3. Seva

(4:15:46) Take care of the inward sorrows, diseases, and dangerous whirlpool in the course of your life, and do not fall into the black hole of selfishness, which gives the soul its greatest anguish. 96

(2:13:48) Those who are engaged in the world but do not mix in it, like the all-illuminating sun, are known as the best of men. 98

(6:2:47:30) It is the nature of virtuous men, to deliver their neighbours from danger and calamity, and to lead them towards wellbeing and prosperity, as the sun leads people to light. 100

5. The Gift of Life

(6:2:201:22) I am neither content nor discontent with anything, nor do I rejoice or repine at any event. I do what is my duty in society without retaining the erroneous conception of reaping the reward. 154

Glossary

Abhyasa – constant and steady practice without any interruption, which is performed with an attitude of reverence; to remain established in the effort of sadhana.

Acharya – spiritual preceptor, master.

Adharma – disharmony; not fulfilling one's natural role in life; unrighteousness.

Adhikari – eligible person; one with the correct qualifications.

Agni – fire; the god of fire.

Ahimsa – non-violence in thought, word and deed; one of the five yamas described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* as a preliminary practice of yoga. See Yama.

Aishvarya – divine attributes like wisdom, renunciation; supremacy, sovereignty, power.

Akarta – non-doer.

Aklishta – non-painful; pleasant.

Ananda – pure bliss; natural state of consciousness.

Anasakti – non-attachment; unaffected, emotionally detached; indifference to all sense experiences.

Anitya – impermanent.

Antahkarana – literally, 'inner tool', experienced or manifest mind, consisting of: ahamkara, manas, buddhi and chitta.

Aparigraha – abstention from greed; non-covetousness; one of the five yamas described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* as a preliminary practice of yoga. See Yama.

Arjuna – name of the third Pandava brother, who was the son of Lord Indra and Kunti. In the *Bhagavad Gita* he received a divine revelation from Sri Krishna.

Asana – a specific yoga posture; used in hatha yoga to channel prana, open the chakras and remove energy blocks; in raja yoga, a physical posture in which one is at ease and in harmony with oneself.

Ashram – place of spiritual practice and growth through internal and external labour.

Ashtanga – eight limbs.

Ashtanga yoga – the eight limbs of yoga described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi; the ashtanga yoga of Swami Sivananda: serve, love, give, purify, do good, be good, meditate, realize.

Asteya – non-stealing, honesty; one of the five yamas described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* as a preliminary practice of yoga. See Yama.

Atma, atman – the self beyond mind and body; principle of life, highest reality, Supreme Consciousness, spirit, soul.

Atmabhava – feeling of unity with all; seeing the atman (soul) equally in all beings.

Avatara – descent or incarnation of God to the mortal plane.

Avidya – ignorance of reality; ignorance.

Avyavahara – free from worldly activities or concerns; not concerned with worldly life.

Bhagavad Gita – literally, ‘divine song’; Sri Krishna’s discourse to his disciple Arjuna delivered on the battlefield of Kurukshetra at the commencement of the great Mahabharata war; one of the source books of Hindu philosophy, containing the essence of the Upanishads and yoga.

Bhajan – devotional song.

Bhakta – devotee.

Bhakti – intense inner devotion in which the intellect, emotions and self are channelled towards a relationship with the divine.

Bhakti yoga – branch of yoga in which emotional energy is channelled towards a divine relationship; a systematic path with nine stages which expand, strengthen, and purify the emotions.

Bhava, bhavana – feeling; condition; attitude; inclination or disposition of mind.

Brahma – god of the Hindu trinity who creates the universe; God as creator; manifest force of life and creation; ever-expanding, limitless Consciousness; Absolute Reality.

Brahmakarma – karma done for the sake of others; noble, higher karma.

Brahma Sutras – famous, terse and far reaching classical vedantic text written by Sage Vyasa.

Brahmacharya – being absorbed in higher consciousness; sensual restraint; celibacy; conduct suitable for proceeding to the highest state of existence; one of the five yamas described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* as a preliminary practice of yoga. See Yama.

Brahmajnana – experience and knowledge of Brahman, pure Consciousness or the Absolute; divine knowledge.

Brahman – etymologically ‘ever expanding, limitless consciousness’; name of Supreme Consciousness or cosmic intelligence according to Vedanta philosophy; God as creator; monistic concept of Absolute Reality.

Brahmin – the priestly caste; one whose consciousness is immersed in Brahman.

Buddha – literally, ‘the enlightened one’; commonly referring to the founder of Buddhism.

Buddhi – discerning, discriminating aspect of mind; aspect of mind closest to pure consciousness; one of the four parts of the antahkarana, or inner instrument. See Antahkarana.

Chetana – consciousness.

Chintan – thinking, thought; worry, care, anxiety.

Chitta – individual consciousness, including the subconscious and unconscious layers of mind; thinking, concentration, attention, enquiry; storehouse of memory or samskaras;

one of the four parts of the antahkarana, or inner instrument. See Antahkarana.

Dareshana – desire for relationship with another; particularly emotional connection and sexual interaction.

Darshan – a glimpse; vision; direct perception; philosophy.

Darshana – philosophical system of the vedic tradition based on revelations or truths that were ‘seen’.

Devi – female deity, goddess.

Dharana – practice of concentration or complete attention; sixth stage of ashtanga yoga described in Sage Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* as holding or binding the mind to one point.

Dharma – the natural role one plays in life; ethical law; duty; the laws or fundamental support of life; righteousness.

Dharmakshetra – field of dharmic action; the battlefield of life.

Dhyana – spontaneous state of meditation; one-pointedness of mind through concentration on either a form, thought or sound; absorption in the object of meditation; seventh stage of Sage Patanjali’s ashtanga yoga.

Dosha – three humours of the body described in ayurveda: mucus (kapha), bile (pitta) and wind (vata). Their imbalance prevents the flow of energy in sushumna nadi.

Dvaita – duality.

Dwesha – repulsion, aversion; hatred, enmity, dislike; one of the five causes of affliction (kleshas) described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*.

Ganga – the river Ganges, the most sacred river in India; pingala nadi.

Govinda – name of Sri Krishna who controls or enchants the mind and senses.

Guna – quality; the three gunas, qualities or aspects of prakriti are sattwa, rajas and tamas.

Guru – one who dispels the darkness caused by ignorance (avidya); teacher of the science of ultimate reality who by the light of his own atma can dispel darkness, ignorance and illusion from the mind and enlighten the consciousness of a devotee/disciple; preceptor.

Hanuman – name of a powerful monkey chief possessing extraordinary strength and powers which he manifested on several critical occasions on behalf of Sri Rama, the Lord of his heart.

Hari – name of Vishnu, the god of the Hindu trinity who is entrusted with the preservation of the universe; Supreme Consciousness.

Hatha yoga – a system of yoga specifically utilizing practices for bodily purification; yoga of attaining physical and mental purity and balancing the prana (energy) in ida and pingala nadis so that sushumna nadi opens, enabling samadhi experiences.

Homa – sacrificial fire which symbolizes the divine light on earth; ritualistic process in which oblations are offered into the fire.

Indriya – sense organ; power of the senses; power.

Ishavasya Upanishad – the last chapter of the Yajur Veda which speaks of the supreme knowledge; also known as the Vedanta Upanishad as it contains the essence of vedantic philosophy.

Ishwara – higher reality; God; non-changing, indestructible principle or quality.

Ishwara pranidhana – cultivation of faith in the supreme or indestructible reality; surrender to God; complete dedication of one's actions and will to the Lord; one of the niyamas described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*. See Niyama.

Ishwararpana – worship of the Lord; offering to God.

Janaka, King – father, progenitor; name of a famous king of Videha or Mithila, who was the foster-father of Sita. He was remarkable for his great knowledge, good works and holiness.

Japa – a meditation practice involving repetition of a mantra.

Jivanmukta – liberated in life; an enlightened person, a person purified by true knowledge of the Supreme Reality and freed from future births while still embodied.

Jnana – knowledge, cognition, wisdom; higher knowledge derived from meditation or from inner experience.

Jnana agni – the fire of wisdom.

Jnana yoga – yoga of knowledge and wisdom attained through spontaneous self-analysis and study of scriptures; leading a discriminative lifestyle, living with wisdom.

Jnani – one who expresses wisdom in daily life.

Kali – primal manifestation of Shakti; wife of Shiva; deity, divine mother; destroyer of time, space and object, i.e. ignorance.

Kali Yuga – the present age, last of the four ages or cycles in the Day of Brahma and Maha Yuga, which began in 3,102 BC and has a duration of 432,000 years. During this cycle man is collectively at the height of technology, decadence, dishonesty and corruption of spiritual awareness; dark, evil, difficult and full of strife.

Karma – action and result; law of cause and effect.

Karma yoga – yogic path of action; union with the Supreme Consciousness through action; action without attachment to the fruits of action.

Karta – doer; one who performs actions with the inner attitude that ‘I am doing’.

Kartavya – duty; that which ought to be done.

Kashi – the modern Varanasi (Benares); the sacred city of Shiva.

Khechari mudra – literally, ‘the attitude of moving in space’; tongue lock; a hatha yoga practice in which the elongated tongue passes back into the pharynx to stimulate the flow of life-giving nectar (amrita), whereas in the milder raja yoga form the tongue is inserted in, or folded backwards towards, the upper cavity of the palate.

Kirtan – singing of God’s name; practice in which a group of people sing a collection of mantras.

Klishta – painful, hard or difficult.

Koorma – a tortoise.

Krishna, Sri – literally, ‘black’ or ‘dark’; eighth incarnation of Vishnu; avatara who descended in the Dwapara Yuga. Sri Krishna is perhaps the most celebrated hero in Hindu mythology and seems to be an historical figure. To

uphold dharma he orchestrated the Mahabharata war. His teachings to his friend and disciple Arjuna during that war are immortalized in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Kriya – action; cleansing practice (shatkarma); practice of kriya yoga.

Kriya yoga – practices of kundalini yoga designed to speed the evolution of humanity.

Kshatriya – the warrior caste; one who protects others from injury.

Kula – family, lineage, race.

Kumbhaka – internal or external retention of the breath.

Kundalini – the evolutionary energy in a human being; spiritual energy; Devi described as the potential energy of a human being dormant in mooladhara chakra, which, when awakened, awakens the chakras, resulting in progressive enlightenment.

Lanka – name of the island residence of Ravana, presently called Sri Lanka.

Laya yoga – literally, ‘union by absorption’; yoga of conscious dissolution of individuality.

Lila – literally, ‘play’; activity of prakriti and its three gunas.

Lokasangraha – upliftment of society; wellbeing and solidarity of the world.

Lokeshana – desire for name and fame; attachment to any expectations from people or the world.

Maha – great; noble.

Mahabharata – epic of ancient India said to be composed by Sage Veda Vyasa, involving the history and consequences of the great battle between the Kaurava and Pandava princes. It consists of eighteen sections and the *Bhagavad Gita* is a part of it.

Mahatma – literally, ‘great soul’; used with reference to a person who has destroyed the ego and realized the self as one with all.

Mantra – words of power; sound vibrations which liberate the mind when repeated.

- Maryada purushottam** – the best person, who never crosses the boundaries of appropriateness; a person who has spontaneously correct responses to any situation and as a result does not create discord within oneself or others.
- Maya** – means by which Brahman creates the phenomenal world; power of creation; illusive power; in Vedanta philosophy, the two powers of maya are: 1. the power of veiling, and 2. the power of projection; in Samkhya philosophy, another name for Prakriti.
- Mayavada** – theory of illusion, doctrine of the phenomenal character of the universe.
- Mithya** – unreal, false; in vain.
- Moha** – delusion; infatuation.
- Moksha** – liberation from the cycles of birth and death and the illusion of maya.
- Mukta** – free, liberated.
- Mukti** – release, liberation, final absolution of the consciousness from the chain of birth and death and from the illusion of maya.
- Nada yoga** – the process of penetrating deeper and deeper into the nature of one's own reality by listening to subtle inner sounds.
- Narayana** – epithet of Lord Vishnu, the god of the Hindu trinity who is the supporter of life.
- Nimitta** – instrument; instrumental cause.
- Nirakara** – without form, formless; unmanifest.
- Niravayava** – without constituents or limbs.
- Nirguna** – without quality or attribute; formless.
- Nirvana** – cessation of suffering; final liberation or emancipation in Buddhist thought.
- Nirvikalpa samadhi** – state in which the mind ceases to function and only pure consciousness remains; superconscious state where mental modifications cease to exist, resulting in transcendence of the manifest world.
- Nishchaya** – ascertainment; resoluteness; determination; resolution, conclusion.

Nishkama karma – action done without desire. This type of action purifies the mind and heart without creating new bondage.

Nishkriya – without action, without movement.

Nitya – continual, perpetual, constant, uninterrupted; everlasting, eternal.

Niyama – observance of rules or rules of personal discipline to render the mind tranquil in preparation for meditation; the second step of the eight limbs (ashtanga yoga) of Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*: shaucha (purity), santosha (contentment), tapas (austerity), swadhyaya (self-study) and Ishwara pranidhana (surrender to God).

Nyaya – one of the six Indian philosophical systems; the spiritually correct way; recognition of real spiritual experience by the omniscient mind that is all-encompassing and all-pervading.

Padmasana – lotus pose; classical meditative posture.

Papa – evil, sin; inauspiciousness; demerit; anything which takes one away from dharma.

Paramartha – literally, ‘the highest effort’; working for the good of others.

Paropakara – social karma, working for the benefit of others in society.

Parvati – goddess and consort of Shiva, mother of Ganesha and Kartikeya.

Patanjali, Sage – author of the *Yoga Sutras*; an ancient rishi who codified the system of raja yoga, including ashtanga yoga.

Pooja – worship.

Prakriti – individual nature; nature; manifest and unmanifest nature composed of the three gunas; the active principle of manifest energy; counterpart of purusha in Samkhya philosophy.

Prana – vital energy force sustaining life and creation, permeating the whole of creation and existing in both the macrocosmos and microcosmos.

Pranayama – a series of techniques using the breath to control the flow of prana within the body.

Prasad – favour, grace; blessed gift or object, something full of grace.

Pratyahara – restraining the sensory and motor organs; withdrawal and emancipation of the mind from the domination of the senses and sensual objects; training the senses to follow the mind within; fifth stage of ashtanga yoga described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*.

Prem – love, affection; tenderness; regard.

Punya – merit.

Purushartha – human attainment; the four basic needs or desires to be fulfilled in life, viz. artha (wealth), kama (love), dharma (duty), moksha (liberation).

Purushottam – the best type of individual, the best type of person, who is an example to emulate.

Raga – passion; affection; attachment; one of the five causes of affliction (kleshas) described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as attraction or attachment to what gives pleasure.

Raja yoga – the supreme yoga; union through control of the mental processes and concentration of mind; the most authoritative text is Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* which contain ashtanga yoga, the eightfold path.

Rajas – one of the three gunas or attributes; dynamism; state of activity; creativity combined with full ego involvement. See Guna.

Rajoguna – quality of rajas.

Rama, Sri – the seventh avatara of Vishnu and embodiment of dharma, hero of the epic *Ramayana*; a heroic and virtuous king.

Ramacharitamanas – a version of the *Ramayana* written by Tulsidas. It is composed in poetic form and is chanted by devotees throughout India.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa – (1836–1886) Indian saint and mystic who perfected sadhanas from all religions; guru of Swami Vivekananda.

Ramana Maharshi – (1879–1950) a renowned jnana yoga and enlightened sage who taught mainly through silence; establisher of the path of self-enquiry.

Ramayana – one of the most famous ancient Indian epics, relating the life of Sri Rama, the most widely known version was composed by Valmiki, containing about 24,000 verses in seven chapters.

Ravana – the ten-headed demon king who kidnapped Sita, Sri Rama's wife, and was slain by Sri Rama; his ten heads symbolize attachment to phenomenal reality.

Rishi – seer; realized sage; one who contemplates or meditates on the Self.

Ritambhara prajna – cosmic experience; the power or truth obtained in the super-reflective state of samadhi.

Sadhaka – one who practises sadhana; a spiritual aspirant.

Sadhana – spiritual practice or discipline performed regularly.

Sadhanatmak – sequential approach to yoga; practical aspect of yoga.

Sadhu – good or holy person, sage, saint.

Sakama karma – action motivated by desire; selfish or egotistic action.

Sakara – with form; manifest.

Sakshi – that which observes the phenomenal reality without being affected at all; witness.

Samadhi – the culmination of meditation, state of oneness of mind with the object of concentration and the universal consciousness; self-realization; the eighth stage of raja yoga.

Samatvam – equipoise; balance in life.

Samskara – mental impression stored in the subtle body as an archetype; the impressions which condition one's nature, causing one to react or respond in a certain way.

Sanatana dharma – system of eternal values underlying the vedic civilization. See dharma.

Sankalpa – positive resolve; purpose, aim, intention; willpower.

Sankirtan – see Kirtan.

Sannyasa – dedication; complete renunciation of the world, its possessions and attachments; abandonment of the phenomenal world.

Sannyasin – one who has taken sannyasa initiation, surrendering everything to the guru and the spiritual journey.

Sanskrit – language of the vedic civilization, still used in India and the yogic culture.

Santosha – contentment in any situation; one of the niyamas described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* as a preliminary practice of yoga. See Niyama.

Satchidananda – literally, ‘truth-consciousness-bliss’; the nature of Supreme Consciousness.

Satkarma – literally, ‘true action’; doing good acts; any act that helps another person.

Satsang, satsanga – gathering in which the ideals and principles of truth are discussed; spiritual association; association with the wise and the good.

Sattwa – one of the three gunas, or attributes of nature; state of luminosity, harmony, equilibrium and purity. See Guna.

Satya – truth; speaking the truth; being truthful to oneself; honesty; one of the yamas described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* as a preliminary practice of yoga. See Yama.

Savikalpa samadhi – a kind of samadhi in which the mind still retains its material impressions (distinctions such as between subject and object, or of the knower and the known).

Seva – service; selfless service; literally, ‘being That’; to become one with the divine transcendental nature, and to express that nature in thought, word and deed.

Sevak – one who practises seva.

Shambhu – name for Shiva.

Shankaracharya, Adi – the name of a celebrated teacher of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy, he was an enlightened sage who is said to have established the Dashnami order of sannyasa and authored a large number of scriptural works.

Shanti – peace, tranquillity; absence of passion, complete indifference to all worldly enjoyment.

Shaucha – cleanliness; one of the niyamas described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* as a preliminary practice of yoga. See Niyama.

Sheshnag – name of a celebrated multi-hooded serpent said to have one thousand heads, represented as forming the couch on which Vishnu reclines, or as supporting the entire universe on his head.

Shiva – state of pure consciousness, individual and cosmic, original source of yoga; Lord of yogis; auspicious, benevolent one; name of the god of the Hindu trinity who is entrusted with the work of destruction; destroyer of the ego and duality.

Shraddha – trust, faith, belief; religious faith; sedateness, composure of mind.

Shuddha – pure; pure in nature.

Shuddhi – purification, purity.

Shudra – the servant caste; one of the four varnas or divisions of the caste system in India; one who naturally tends to engage in service or whose duty is to serve.

Sita Kalyanam – a Shakti yajna; a yearly event held at Rikhiapeth, India.

Smriti – memory; a class of texts called dharma shastra handed down by tradition.

Somarasa – a divine and intoxicating drink made from the soma plant and used in ancient sacrificial offerings.

Sthitaprajna – whose wisdom is firmly established and does not waver, who is unmoved by the dualities (eg. pleasure and pain, gain and loss) and is unshakeably established in superconsciousness.

Swabhava – one's own essential nature.

Swadharma – one's own duty in life; the most appropriate actions for each person to perform in accordance with his inner nature.

Swadhyaya – self-study; continuous conscious awareness of what one is doing; study of scriptures; one of the niyamas described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* as a preliminary practice of yoga. See Niyama.

Swami – literally, 'master over the mind'; master of the self; title of sannyasins.

Swaroop – one's own form or shape; natural state or condition; essential nature; true constitution.

Swartha – attachment to one's own welfare; selfishness.

Tamas – one of the three gunas or attributes of nature; inertia, stability; ignorance, darkness; unwillingness to change. See Guna.

Tamoguna – quality of tamas.

Tapas – austerity; a specific type of pain and hardship; this pain is of three types: adhyatmika, spiritual, adhidevika, natural or environmental, and adhibhautika, physical; one of the niyamas described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* as a preliminary practice of yoga. See Niyama.

Tatastha – indifferent, neutral; where there exists neither attraction or repulsion.

Trataka – one of the shatkarmas; a technique of gazing steadfastly upon an object such as a candle flame, black dot or yantra with unblinking eyes.

Trishna – craving; temptation.

Tulsidas – tauthor of one of the versions of the famous epic *Ramayana* called the *Ramacharitamanas*, which describes the life of Sri Rama. It is composed in poetic form and is chanted by devotees throughout India.

Tyaga – renunciation or gradual dissociation of the mind from worldly objects and desire.

Udasina – indifferent, unconcerned, passive; neutral.

Upanishads – the philosophical portion of the Vedas, traditionally one hundred and eight in number, containing intimate dialogues and discussions between guru and disciple on the nature of the Absolute and the path leading towards it; literally, 'to sit near and listen' (to the spiritual teacher); regarded as the source of Vedanta, Yoga and Samkhya philosophies.

Vairagya – non-attachment; absence of sensual craving and desires; detachment; supreme dispassion.

Vaishnav Devī – a place of pilgrimage in northern India.

Vaishnava – the sect that reveres incarnations of Vishnu as the Supreme Reality.

Vaishya – merchant caste; one who specializes in trade or undertakes responsibility of caring for society.

- Vasishtha, Sage** – a celebrated rishi and seer of the Vedas; guru of Sri Rama; author of many vedic hymns. His teachings are recorded in *Yoga Vasishtha*, one of the greatest expositions of jnana yoga.
- Vedanta** – one of the six principle systems of Indian philosophy; literally, ‘the last part of the Vedas’; the school of Hindu thought based primarily on the Upanishads; the doctrine of non-dualism (Advaita).
- Vedas** – ancient texts revealed to the sages and saints of India, explaining and regulating every aspect of life from Supreme Reality to worldly affairs; four in number: Rig, Yajur, Sama, Atharva, which are further divided into the Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka and Upanishads; the oldest books in the library of mankind, parts of them revealed to sages and seers before 5000 BC.
- Vichara** – reflection; enquiry into the nature of the self, Brahman or truth.
- Vidya** – knowledge or science, particularly knowledge of spiritual truth and non-mundane reality.
- Vikshepa** – dissipation; the tossing of the mind which obstructs concentration.
- Vishnu** – vedic deity; the second deity of the Hindu trinity (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva), entrusted with the preservation of the universe, a duty which obliges him to appear in several incarnations; Supreme Consciousness.
- Vishwamitra, Sage** – literally, ‘friend of the universe’; a celebrated sage.
- Vitteshana** – desire for money, material possessions or security.
- Viveka** – discrimination; right knowledge or understanding; sense of discrimination between the self and what is not the self, between the eternal and the transitory, between consciousness and unconsciousness, between prakriti and purusha.
- Vivekananda, Swami** – (1863–1903); disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa; he brought his guru’s teachings to the West.

Vritti – a modification arising in the mind related to a thought pattern; a particular state or condition.

Vyavaharatmak – the applied, expressive aspect of yoga.

Yajna – sacrifice; yajna has three components: ritual or worship, satsang and unconditional giving.

Yama – self-restraints or rules of conduct which render the mind tranquil; first stage of the eight limbs of yoga (ashtanga yoga) of Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*: ahimsa (non-violence), satya (truth), asteya (honesty), brahmacharya (continence) and aparigraha (abstention from greed).

Yoga – union; the root is yuj, meaning 'to join', 'to yoke'; a system of practice leading to a state of union between the individual and universal awareness; practices, philosophy and lifestyle to achieve peace, power and spiritual wisdom as well as perfect health, a sound mind and a balanced personality; one of the six main systems of Indian philosophy.

Yoga Sutras – ancient authoritative text on raja yoga by Sage Patanjali.

Yoga Vasishtha – a monumental scripture on Vedanta in the form of a dialogue between Sri Rama and his guru Sage Vasishtha.

Yogi – an adept of yoga; follower of the yoga system of philosophy and practice.

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